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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 12 April 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 12 avril 2021

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I wish to acknowledge this territory as the traditional gathering place for many Indigenous nations, most recently the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

This being the first sitting Monday of the month, we will now have the Canadian national anthem, O Canada, followed by the royal anthem.

Playing of the national anthem/Écoute de l'hymne national.

Playing of the royal anthem/Écoute de l'hymne royal.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

CONDOMINIUM LEGISLATION

Mr. Aris Babikian: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should consult with stakeholders and interested parties about expanding the jurisdiction of the Condominium Authority Tribunal to better serve and protect condominium owners.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Aris Babikian: It is an honour to stand up today and table an important social policy-related legislation affecting hundreds of thousands of condominium owners and their families who live in Ontario. The motion to consult the public and the stakeholders about expanding the jurisdiction of the Condominium Authority Tribunal would give owners the ability to resolve more condominium-related disputes more conveniently, quicker and more affordably, and would also build on the excellent work that is under way.

The vision of owning a home where parents can raise their children is a Canadian dream, and the most significant investment in one's life. When making their decision, it is important that purchasers are appropriately informed and protected so that they can be confident in their new home. Regrettably, far too often, the dream turns into a nightmare for a large number of condominium owners due to no fault of their own. The condominium owners are in a David-and-Goliath struggle with condo management corporations.

In her December 2020 value-for-money audit, the Auditor General of Ontario stated: "The existing model for

the condo sector does not provide effective consumer protection and does not address the risks that exist for condo owners and buyers."

Mr. Speaker, almost two million people in Ontario live in condos and many more are currently considering a condo purchase. We have seen the number of condo units increase by roughly 300% since 2001, and there are close to 900,000 condo units in Ontario, with 86% owned by individuals. This is a growing and important sector in our province, and it is a priority as we recover from COVID-19.

The Ontario condominium industry is valued at \$300 billion and there are 11,350 condo corporations that manage the industry. The Ontario condominium construction market is the fastest-growing condominium market in North America. Meanwhile, the GTA is one of the three most-prohibitive housing markets in Canada.

The Condominium Authority of Ontario exists to fulfill responsibilities under the Condominium Act and to safeguard consumers in making what is often the biggest financial decision of their lives. When the Condominium Authority of Ontario was designated in 2017, the Liberal government did not give the Condominium Authority Tribunal enough provisions to deal with disputes that owners were facing. This left many condominium owners unable to deal with issues that were occurring.

During the last three years of my service as an elected official of Scarborough–Agincourt, I have heard heart-wrenching stories that condominium owners had to face. Through meetings with condo owners, I found out that some of the owners' complaints are related to the management's lack of transparency and accountability. Other common recurring complaints included excessive maintenance fees, a rapid increase in reserve fund contributions, the manipulation of the boards' elections by the management company, unqualified property managers who lack basic knowledge in the field, questionable financial decisions, ignoring the director's right to see accounting records, pushing repairs of damages back on owners, maligning owners who challenge or criticize the manager, and last but not least, there are threats of legal proceedings against outspoken owners.

0910

In one such case, at the AGM of the condo board, an owner who publicly criticized the manager's performance and submitted a complaint to CMRAO was accused of harassment and was threatened with legal action if she did not stop expressing her views. Another owner who wanted to run for a board position faced a mini-war with the management and the corporation. These restrictions

infringe on the owner's most fundamental human and civil rights.

Due to the absence of industry standards and enforcement of regulations, the 11,350 condominium-management corporations are self-governing. Each drafts its own regulations and bylaws. It is perplexing to realize that this industry does not have a vigorous administrative authority compared to other Ontario industries in similar or parallel fields. In that spirit, I completely support the action of consulting the stakeholders and interested parties about expanding the jurisdiction of the Condominium Authority Tribunal to better serve and protect condominium owners. That is why our government has shown, time and again, that we are committed to improving the availability of information for protecting the growing numbers of condo buyers.

I want to begin by looking at the problem we are solving. We have heard through our constituents and past consultations that access to the tribunal to resolve more types of disputes is a priority of condo owners and condo corporations. In the past, the only way condo corporations, condo owners or mortgagees could resolve disputes not covered by the jurisdiction of the tribunal was informally or through mediation, arbitration or court. This could be burdensome and expensive for the parties involved, resulting sometimes in thousands or tens of thousands of dollars of expenses. Plus, as the Auditor General has recognized, it bogged down the courts.

Last October, we achieved a significant milestone to deliver a better tribunal for Ontarians. We worked with the Condominium Authority of Ontario to both expand the jurisdiction of the Condominium Authority Tribunal and to launch its online multi-party dispute platform. Following the government's amendments to O. Reg. 179/17, effective October 1, 2020, the tribunal finally became able to receive applications for a wider range of dispute types.

The tribunal's online dispute resolution is Canada's first fully online tribunal, another digital first for the Condominium Authority of Ontario under our government. The online tribunal offers a three-stage dispute resolution process—negotiation, mediation and adjudication—and allows individuals to participate online from anywhere, including from their homes. The platform now supports cases involving three or more parties and the participation of witnesses and intervenors in a more user-friendly and cost-effective way than ever before. It relieves the courts of small disputes, and results in much faster resolutions.

Given that Ontarians have been spending so much time at home during the pandemic and that, of course, has led to a rise in common element issues, it is more important than ever that we give people the ability to deal with issues quickly and easily from anywhere. I welcome the tribunal's expansion, which already has been a catalyst for enhanced accountability and transparency related to the obligations related to the access to records. With the increased jurisdiction and a better digital process, the tribunal will be able to resolve more disputes and bring further clarity regarding the issues condo owners and my constituents face. But there is more to do.

In December of last year, the Auditor General of Ontario conducted an audit of the Condominium Authority of Ontario and made a strong recommendation about further improvements to the tribunal. Her office stated, "To better protect condo owners as they face condominium-living issues and disputes, we recommend that the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services work with the Condominium Authority of Ontario to include key areas relating to condo fees, repairs to common areas, board misconduct, reserve funds, commercial units or other areas considered appropriate within the Condominium Authority Tribunal's jurisdiction."

The Ministry of Government and Consumer Services in turn agreed that tribunal jurisdiction should continue to expand. My colleague the Minister of Government and Consumer Services is an incredible advocate for homebuyers. She and her team are planning for future regulatory proposals to expand the tribunal's jurisdiction in phases.

Through today's motion, I am asking for government to consult with the stakeholders and interested parties about future steps so that we can make best-in-class improvements to protect the people of Ontario. Our homes are so much more than investments. They are where we live our lives, where our families grow, and now, where many of us spend our workdays. We have an opportunity here to create a better consumer protection process that will address the concerns that keep too many condo owners up at night. With the support of this motion, we will engage those very same people and do it right. This will be a key part in our government's commitment to listen to the needs of Ontarians and respond with the modern solutions that work in today's changing marketplace.

This Legislature will recall that in January we launched our Ontario's first comprehensive condo buyers' guide, full of easy-to-use plain language that puts knowledge into the hands of people at one of the biggest decision points of their lives. I am proud of my humble contribution to pave the way for a better future to condo owners and their families. As elected officials, it is our mandate to safeguard the financial, social, health and well-being of our citizens.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, the Auditor General, Nancy Kuyumcu and so many other condo owners—

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: I want to start by saying that the NDP has a long-standing history in standing up for condos—people who own condos, rather. We're talking about people who are fighting to make sure that something that they spend their whole life trying to buy, their residence, is something that is being treated with dignity and respect. We've been a long-time fighter to ensure that people who own condos are treated with dignity, treated with respect and have access to the rights that they need.

Many in this House may know a long-time veteran MPP, someone I had the pleasure of knowing for a long

time: the past MPP for the area of Spadina–Fort York, Rosario Marchese.

Interjections.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: A round of applause for Rosario. I know Rosario very well, because I know he and my brother had long-standing conversations about a variety of topics. Particularly, they were both a bit of fashion icons. Rosario is well known in this House for his iconic—I want to say, green glasses, was it? He had very iconic glasses.

I had the pleasure of meeting Rosario many, many times, and he would continually communicate and talk about this issue of condos, because this area, Spadina–Fort York, to my understanding, has the largest concentration of condominiums in the entire country. Because of that, he was well aware of the obstacles that people who own condos were facing. They were widespread. They were talking about issues around repairs, issues around mismanagement of the boards under which people resided, in these condominium corporations.

When you buy a home, when you buy a condominium, you want to have that feeling of security, that security of safety, that feeling of reliability. But instead, time and again, owners of condominiums are facing a whole slew of issues that are resulting in basically them not having that sense of security with their home because of issues around repairs and issues around the management of the condominium corporation.

0920

I'm very proud to say that this legacy of standing up for condominium owners has been continued by current NDP MPPs right now, and I talk specifically about the member from Spadina–Fort York, MPP Chris Glover. He is an individual who has been standing up and fighting very hard for condominium owners and for people trying their very best to just have a home and make sure their home is treated with respect. The member from London North Centre, Terence Kernaghan, is another strong advocate for people who own condominiums and don't want to be faced with this whole slew of repairs and issues that arise because of mismanagement, because of not-proper processes around repairs and all these issues that can stem from them.

The NDP is going to continue to stand up for folks who spend their hard-earned dollars to get a home, to get a condominium. They just want to make sure that they are treated with respect and they get access to the resources that they need and access to a home that doesn't have to be continually faced with repair issues or mismanagement of condominium boards or even shoddy construction. That's a huge issue as well, when you have these condominiums that are, frankly, growing every day throughout Toronto and specifically throughout ridings like Spadina–Fort York. We have seen issues around the quality of these condominiums and how they're being constructed.

If we don't stand up for condominium owners now, it's going to result in issues down the road because the status of these condominiums is going to further deteriorate, the status of their investment is going to potentially be further

worsened, and their quality of living is at risk when you have shoddy construction. We need to continually stand up for condominium owners.

I'm very proud of the long legacy of folks in the NDP, starting from the past MPP Rosario Marchese, to the member from Spadina–Fort York currently, and the member from London North Centre. The NDP is committed to folks who are trying their best to have a livelihood and to have a home. It's the least that people deserve after working such a long period of time to get enough resources together to purchase a condominium: that they get one that is built with due diligence, that is managed properly and that is safe and healthy.

Thank you so much, Speaker. That concludes my remarks. I look forward to the debate.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to the motion tabled by my colleague the member for Scarborough–Agincourt. This is a very important motion, Speaker. As the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, I'm glad to let everyone in the House know today that the ministry is very interested in this motion and the debate here as well.

Mr. Speaker, motion 149 reads: "That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should consult with stakeholders and interested parties about expanding the jurisdiction of the Condominium Authority Tribunal to better serve and protect condominium owners." It's really a very simple motion, but it takes on a few issues that are very important: consultation and home ownership.

I will start with the importance of the latter. Home ownership takes on many forms these days. Condominium ownership has grown immensely in our province over the last two decades. Of course, everyone knows about the boom in condo ownership in the GTA and major urban centres. Almost two million people in Ontario live in condos today.

Even in smaller cities like my riding of Sarnia–Lambton, we are seeing the development of a number of condo projects. Condominiums make up about 5% of residential housing in my riding, and that number is expected to continue to grow. There are many people in Sarnia–Lambton living in family homes who are looking to downsize and give up some of the added responsibilities that come along with the ownership of a detached single-family home.

But condo ownership has different challenges than home ownership as well, and buyers might not truly appreciate those challenges until after they put their money down. So it's very important for our government to do everything we can do to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Condominium Authority of Ontario can fulfill its responsibilities under the Condominium Act and increase protections for condo buyers in the process.

In that spirit, I completely support the member's motion and the emphasis on consulting with stakeholders about

expanding the scope of the Condominium Authority Tribunal to better serve and protect condominium owners.

Over the years, my constituency staff and I have had a number of conversations with condo owners who were frustrated by the existing system created by previous governments. The only way to resolve disputes that fell outside of the tribunal's authority was through mediation, arbitration or court. No one wanted to use any of those options. They were expensive, time-consuming and difficult to navigate. That's why our government has already got to work modernizing the old system.

Last October, our government worked with the condominium authority to expand the jurisdiction of the Condominium Authority Tribunal and to launch a new online multi-party dispute platform. The tribunal dispute resolution portal is Canada's first fully online tribunal—another example of how we are leading the country in consumer protection. The accessibility of this online dispute resolution process is really important, because as more Ontarians have been spending so much time at home during the pandemic, it has led to a rise in common element issues. It's more important than ever that we give people the tools necessary to resolve those issues so they can get back to enjoying their home. Of course, the member's motion is looking forward to how we can continue to improve.

The Auditor General has looked at the condominium authority and made her recommendations. The AG has recommended that the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services work with the condominium authority to include key areas related to condo fees, repairs to common areas, board misconduct, reserve funds and commercial units, among many others. I can let you know that the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services agrees that the tribunal's jurisdiction should continue to expand. My colleague the Minister of Government and Consumer Services is an incredible advocate for homebuyers, and the ministry is already working on a series of regulatory proposals that will expand this jurisdiction.

As a government, we've proven over our mandate our ability to listen to the people and implement the change they want to see. Mr. Speaker, I completely support the member's motion calling for consultations on expanding the jurisdiction of the Condominium Authority Tribunal.

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

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank the member from Scarborough—Agincourt for the opportunity to debate his motion, private members' motion 149, the expansion of the Condo Authority Tribunal jurisdiction. I really think this has the potential to be something good, an opportunity to move forward, and it's been a lot of slow progress.

I think it's important as well—sometimes people think about these things and they go, "I've never had a problem. Why does it have to be changed?" It really comes down to that 90-10 rule, if you've ever heard of that, where 90% of your resources go to 10% of your problems. When you have problems with a condo board, they become critical to you and your family. As the member from Brampton East

already said, one of the largest purchases that you would make is your condo or your house, and struggling with those decisions becomes very difficult.

Also, as the member said, the NDP has been calling for reforms to the Condominium Act since 2007. He talked about Rosario; he tabled his first condo private member's bill in 2007, so it's been a long time coming to move this forward. In fact, he tabled it several times. I pulled up an article from toronto.com from 2012. It says, "For the fourth time in five years, Trinity–Spadina MPP Rosario Marchese has tabled a bill calling for reforms to the condo act."

"Marchese's bill calls for a number of measures designed to help protect condo owners following a growing number of complaints surrounding the industry in recent years.

"Most notably," his bill "demands the establishment of a condo review board, a tribunal where condo owners can have their complaints heard quickly and avoid having to engage in lengthy and expensive court proceedings when they have an issue with a developer, property manager or condo board."

In short, what he wanted to do was to better protect condo owners who were struggling with corrupt condo managers, rigged repair contracts. These are things that we heard from the member opposite when he was explaining his bill—just a sense of fairness, which is, I believe, the goal of the motion as well. I apologize for calling it a bill; the motion.

One of the supporters talked about the importance of establishing a review board, and this motion is about strengthening the review board's ability. The idea of having this ability to resolve disputes is really important, because you want to be able to do this cheaply and quickly without having to go through the court process, because it's not just the anguish, it's the time it takes to resolve things that causes a lot of stress.

It's interesting. Rosario was the member for Trinity–Spadina, which now is probably Spadina–Fort York, MPP Glover's area. When I first became an MPP, MPP Glover, the member from Spadina–Fort York, showed me his area, which probably has the highest density of condos across Canada. Coming from Sudbury, where we do have condos but not to the extent you have in Toronto, it was eye-opening for me, the struggles that people had looking for daycare, child care and other resources and parks, and how there is nothing—no sense of a Landlord and Tenant Board, which don't get me started on—really could be resolved. That sense of fairness and being able to work through things is really, really important.

0930

The Liberal government took many, many years to move forward and get this tribunal in place, but it fell short. I think my colleagues would agree with me: They really fell short on it, because all it could do was follow through on if you failed to disclose statements. That doesn't really help anybody.

By 2019, it was expanded to include pets and parking and storage. I don't know how many disputes there would

be, but that's not far enough. I think this is why it's a good move to expand what we have here.

We have been talking about improving it for a long time on this side of the House, as the Ontario NDP. In fact, when we talked about our housing platform, we talked about strengthening the condominium tribunal to resolve a greater range of disputes quickly and cheaply so that condo owners don't have to fight long and costly lawsuits in court. Also, we want to look at the opportunity that maybe this shouldn't just be private; maybe it should be public to be less costly for the taxpayers as well, and better resourced.

I think it's a decent bill, an opportunity for improvement. I'll end my debate there, Speaker.

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

Mr. Jim McDonnell: It's always a privilege to stand in the House. Today, we speak to the member from Scarborough–Agincourt's motion on the condo fees.

As a former critic for consumer and government services, I very much was involved with the condo issue before and attended one of Justice Cunningham's sessions that he had here in Toronto to hear all the different issues that were going on.

I think the Minister of Government and Consumer Services in her bill just a short time ago—a couple of years—handled a lot of those issues. Certainly, the news of the new online tribunal is so important, because most of the issues that came forth were similar to neighbours' issues—owners, builders. The bill very much separated those two groups and gave them the confidence that the messaging and the answers they were getting were truly independent. I think that's so important.

As the former mayor of South Glengarry, we received so many disputes between neighbours. I think that that resolution mechanism—in this case, very inexpensive—is so important, because they want to see an independent answer. Sometimes, they can call the municipal office and get an answer, but there's always that feeling: Is it the right answer? Generally, lots of times, it's not in their favour. So by taking them to the online consultation board that we have today, they're able to do it cheaply. You have an independent body. I think those are really some of the things that we saw and we heard.

This government truly has a history of listening. In the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, we've gotten to the point of reaching out to our stakeholders, making sure that they're heard and then putting legislation in place that handles any of the concerns that we can deal with. That's similar to what the condo act did. We saw many of the complaints were—builders were accused of not building what they were supposed to and the owners having that. So we separated those two boards so that, it was that appearance of—and not only the appearance, but the fact that you're getting a truly independent view and it's not tainted by one side or the other. We're glad to see that government is continuing to do that. This motion really encourages that. We've heard from the Auditor General.

It's so important. A person's house is their kingdom. It's so important, if you get ownership, that you can rely on it and it provides that confidence.

While we don't have a lot of condominiums in my riding—they're starting in the city of Cornwall—we're finding a lot of retired people want that confidence of being able to move someplace with not a lot of maintenance; maybe they like to travel. But they can move in. They're getting off their farm; they don't want the maintenance there. I think that condominiums are becoming more of an important solution.

It's great that we're seeing more progress, and I commend the member from Scarborough–Agincourt on this motion.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to rise in the House, and today on motion 149, increasing the jurisdiction of the Condominium Authority Tribunal. I'd like to commend the member from Scarborough–Agincourt for bringing this motion forward. I think the thing about private members' bills and motions is they often reflect an issue that is very prominent in an individual riding. I'm sure this is a prominent issue in this riding, as it is in many. In my part of the world, there aren't a lot of condominiums, but I rent one now because we live in Toronto.

He's been mentioned here before: I got my first education about some of the problems about condominiums from my colleague at the time, Rosario Marchese. He was a very well-known MPP here. He introduced his first private member's bill to change the condo act in 2007.

I always like personal stories about this place. Some of you who've served with Rosario—he was an incredibly snappy dresser. I don't think anyone has to really look too hard to see that I am not. He asked me one day, "John, do you only have three jackets?" Because he was watching. I said, "Yes. I'm from northern Ontario. I have one for each season." And then I said, "In my part of the world, if I put a press release out that I bought a fourth one, it actually gets printed."

But people—and my daughter owns a condo as well. Condos are a great way to live for people who want to downsize or who don't want the extra work of home ownership. But your neighbours are much closer, and it's a way of communal living and communal paying of costs, and because of that, it can get problematic. When things like that get problematic, they can get very problematic. So anything that we can do together to improve the lives of condo owners, we're in favour.

Once again, I commend the member. I hope that the government takes this private member's motion and seriously looks at it and seriously looks at some of the issues that condo owners are facing, because many are the same issues that my friend Rosario Marchese identified in 2007. That's a long time to wait, Speaker. This is becoming a more popular way of living, and we need to make sure that people have their full enjoyment from it.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: I want to commend the member from Scarborough–Agincourt for his efforts on behalf of his constituents, many of whom live in condominiums. Many of us in the Legislative Assembly this morning know that it's essential that we consult with that community about expanding the jurisdiction of the Condominium Authority Tribunal to better serve and protect condominium owners. The Minister of Government and Consumer Services' support for further improvements has been echoed by the Condominium Authority of Ontario itself, which has as its mandate a commitment to protect and support condo owners as they face condominium living issues and disputes. With this in mind, the motion we're discussing this morning is a natural next step in our work to strengthen remedies for condo residents across Ontario. Clearly, we must continue to consult with stakeholders and interested parties about future steps so that we can make industry-leading improvements to protect the people of Ontario.

Now, Speaker, I can tell you that in Whitby, I've got several condominiums, some that are situated within the middle of my riding and some that are fronted onto the beautiful waterfront at the south part of my riding overall. There are common issues that arise: condo fees, repairs to common areas, reserve funds. This particular consultation that we will be embarking on will provide an opportunity to address those types of challenges by continuing to expand the jurisdiction of the tribunal in phases, and the input of condo residents, whether it be in Whitby or other parts of Ontario, in my estimation, is critical to a strong rollout. Based on the level of consultation that's taken place thus far, and we will be embarking on, they know best the issues that arise in their homes. We want to hear from them about what they need in their tribunal. That's an important distinction. It's their tribunal, Speaker.

0940

This motion is incredibly timely. It will be a priority for our government, and I thank the minister for her leadership on this particular file, her parliamentary assistant and the civil servants who have worked on this particular issue going forward.

Clearly, it builds on the work already under way and, if passed, will contribute to our government's work to expand the tribunal to cover key areas where issues and disputes arise. There has been a gap in that particular respect for a number of years, some of which previous speakers have pointed out. But this particular consultation that we're about to embark on, I'm pleased to say, will fill that gap. I'm also pleased, as a result, to provide my full support to the hard work of the member from Scarborough–Agincourt.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): There being no further debate, the member for Scarborough–Agincourt has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Aris Babikian: I'm quite pleased to see support from both sides of the aisle for this important initiative. It shows once again that when we work together, we can achieve lots for our communities, our residents and citizens of Ontario.

I would like to thank the members from Brampton East, Sarnia–Lambton, Sudbury, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, Timiskaming–Cochrane and Whitby.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, the Auditor General, Nancy Kuyumcu and so many other condo owners of Scarborough–Agincourt who had the courage to contact me and bring their and their neighbours' plight to my attention.

This motion will support the launch of public consultations to prepare the ground for the strengthening of accountability. With the Auditor General, it is our government that—the accountability to condo owners.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important initiative. I understand there were attempts in the past to bring similar strengthening and enhancing of the condo authorities act. But as they say, better late than never. We still have the opportunity to work together to make this issue a reality, to give the condo owners in Ontario peace of mind. At least they know that their elected officials and their government are working to protect them to enhance their safety and to provide them a brighter future, at least when it comes to one of the most fundamental rights of Ontarians: to own a home in our province. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The time for private members' public business has expired.

Mr. Babikian has moved private members' notice of motion number 149. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE PHILIP, DUKE OF EDINBURGH

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to move a motion without notice respecting an humble address on the passing of His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion with notice that an humble address be presented to Her Majesty the Queen. Agreed? Agreed.

Once again, I'll recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that, notwithstanding any standing order or special order of this House, a motion respecting an humble address may be immediately moved without notice and that 15 minutes shall be allotted to debate on the motion, with five minutes for Her Majesty's loyal opposition, five minutes for the independent members as a group and five minutes for Her Majesty's government; and

That the proceeding of members' statements shall not commence until the debate is completed or until 10:15 a.m., whichever is later.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader has moved that, notwithstanding any standing order or special order of the House, a motion—

Interjection: Dispense.

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

Again, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that an humble address be presented to Her Majesty the Queen in the following words:

“To the Queen’s most Excellent Majesty:

“Most Gracious Sovereign:

“We, Your Majesty’s dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, in Parliament assembled, approach Your Majesty with the expression of our deepest and heartfelt sorrow of the demise of His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.

“We mourn the loss of His Royal Highness, whose grace, distinction and commitment of service to the Kingdom and to the Commonwealth and whose humble and loving support for Your Majesty over so many years has set such an example of strength, character and compassion for us all.

“While His Royal Highness is so fondly remembered by all of us for a lifetime of public service, truly a debt owed by us which shall never be repaid, we know that this loss is most profoundly felt by Your Majesty—the loss of a loving and devoted husband and a lifelong companion and friend.

“We shall, Your Majesty’s loyal subjects, commit our whole selves to sharing the burden of Your Majesty’s profound sorrow and grief. We shall mourn for His Royal Highness as our Prince, we shall mourn for Your Majesty’s partner as our partner, and we shall mourn for the royal family’s father and grandfather as our father and grandfather.

“We repeat the prayer offered to Your Majesty by the House of Commons upon the demise of the Queen Mother: We pray that the God of all consolation may comfort Your Majesty and members of the royal family in your bereavement, and that Your Majesty may long be spared to continue the eminent public services of your great predecessors.”

And that the said address be engrossed.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: I rise on behalf of the official opposition to express our condolences to Her Majesty the Queen and her family on the passing of Prince Philip.

Speaker, in a place as diverse as Ontario, it comes as little surprise that people across the province, and in this House, hold opposing views about the role and impact of the monarchy in Canada—but that is a debate for another day.

As the news broke this past Friday, we heard two recurring accounts of who Prince Philip was. Understandably and expectedly for a man of his standing, we heard about his accomplishments as a decorated war hero and as a patron of hundreds of organizations.

But despite all the accolades, the stories about the Queen and the royal family’s sense of loss made no

reference to his status or formal titles. It was his contributions as a husband, father, grandfather and friend that fuelled their grief. We don’t have much in common with the royal family. I don’t think any of us really understand what it means to be part of the royal family, to be part of the spectacle; it’s so hard to have a personal life. As politicians, we probably understand a little bit of it, but certainly not the full extent.

0950

But if there’s one thing I hope that we all share with the prince, with the royal family, it’s that our loss will resonate most with those closest to us, not because of who we are or what we have accomplished, but for the way we made our loved ones feel in our presence. This sentiment rings even truer in our current circumstances when many of the communal rituals that we normally lean on to get us through grief have been taken away by the pandemic, irrespective of our social standing.

On behalf of Andrea Horwath and Ontario’s NDP, I extend our sympathies to Her Majesty the Queen and the royal family. We sincerely hope that the memories that now bring sadness will quickly become a source of strength that will get them through the challenging days ahead.

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

Mr. John Fraser: It’s an honour to rise today to say some words in honour of Prince Philip. I’d first like to begin by extending the condolences of my family and families in Ottawa South and families across Ontario to Queen Elizabeth II, the royal family, families of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth.

His was a life of great public service. In here, we understand a bit about what public life is all about, but I don’t think we can fully understand the public life that the royal family, Prince Philip, Queen Elizabeth II, have lived. It’s one of tremendous public scrutiny and high expectations, and he met those. There’s a need to be constant, a need to be resolute, a need to be available and accessible, to be there in times of celebration, in times of grief and in times of trouble; and Prince Philip did that, did that for the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth and, most importantly, for his family and his wife, Queen Elizabeth II. Seventy-three years being together is a very long time, and that is remarkable.

I want to add a little bit of a personal story. My mother-in-law and father-in-law, who passed away two years and one year ago, respectively, were both very captured by Prince Philip and the Queen—my mother-in-law very much so. I don’t think it was the magic of royalty, but it was a young family that caught her imagination; it was the resoluteness, the constancy, the public availability, being that rock and being there for people, that inspired her.

I got to understand it a little bit more when my father-in-law—they were both about 90 years old—wrote the Governor General on the Queen’s and Prince Philip’s last visit here to Canada. He wrote a letter that said he was on the advanced team for the princess’s tour, I think, in the 1950s, but he never got a chance to meet her—in the end

it just didn't happen, it didn't connect—and that my mother-in-law, Yvonne, had a great deal of appreciation and admiration for them; and that she'd lost a brother, Ansley, at Dieppe. So he wrote this letter and he sent it off because he was hoping that they could meet Prince Philip and the Queen.

Lo and behold, a few weeks later, a letter arrives from the Governor General inviting them to Rideau Hall for when Prince Philip and the Queen, Queen Elizabeth II, were going to be there. They got there. They just expected to be one of the many of the hundreds there to witness it. They were handed a card that said, "You go over here." What happened was really quite incredible for my mother-in-law, and I can't forget this: They got to personally meet them, have a brief conversation. That meant so much to my mother-in-law. She was 90 years old—90 years old. They were actually both married about the same length of time.

That's what the life of public service is about. It's about connecting, taking a genuine interest in people, even if it's for a brief moment. Prince Philip, as the longest-serving consort of the longest-serving monarch, delivered on that and many, many other things. On behalf of all those families—the royal family—but all those families across the Commonwealth here in Ontario, our deepest condolences and sympathies, and a celebration of a life of service.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, is my sad duty to rise in this place to offer condolences to Her Majesty the Queen for her profound loss. Last Friday, the world learned of the passing of His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, in the final months of his 100th year. His Royal Highness has been a soldier and a hero, a leader and a follower, a father and a grandfather, and a husband and a friend.

Born in 1921 on the island of Corfu as Prince Philip of Greece and Denmark, his early life was characterized by tribulation. At only 18 months, His Royal Highness and family were evacuated from Greece by the Royal Navy as political unrest led to the abdication of his uncle King Constantine I.

As a boy at Gordonstoun School in Scotland, Prince Philip distinguished himself as a proficient athlete, a start which would grow into a lifelong love of sport.

As the world was entering a second great war in 1939, His Royal Highness, like most young men, heard and accepted the noble call to military service. In 1940, he was appointed a midshipman in the Royal Navy, and commissioned as a sub-lieutenant in 1941. At only 19 years old, His Royal Highness won the distinction of Mentions in Dispatches for bravery in the Battle of Cape Matapan aboard HMS Valiant. At only 21 years of age, he was promoted to first lieutenant, making him one of the youngest of that rank in the Royal Navy.

While Prince Philip ended his active military career in 1952, his relationship with the armed forces continued his

entire life, both in the United Kingdom and across the Commonwealth. On the occasion of his 90th birthday, His Royal Highness was made a general in the Canadian army and Royal Canadian Air Force and an admiral of the Royal Canadian Navy by Prime Minister Harper, marking the first time that an honorary rank had been granted at the highest levels of the Canadian Armed Forces.

The full breadth of Prince Philip's honours would be impossible to recount here, but I will recall that he was the second-longest serving member of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, an Extraordinary Commander of the Order of Military Merit, an Extraordinary Companion of the Order of Canada, and he held the Canadian Forces' Decoration with five bars. His Royal Highness served faithfully as colonel-in-chief of several Canadian regiments, and selfishly I will note that above the rest, he was colonel-in-chief of the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (Duke of Edinburgh's Own) when I was a reservist.

Inasmuch as I have drawn a picture of a stalwart military hero, which His Royal Highness most certainly was, there was a lighter side to his unique character which must be remembered. It is no secret that Prince Philip would not hesitate to speak his mind. In a speech in 1960 to the General Dental Council, he joked, "Dontopedalogy is the science of opening your mouth and putting your foot in it, a science which I have practised for a good many years"—a sentiment that I think many of us in this chamber can understand well.

As this House will know, every man is more than the sum of his career, and the picture of no man is complete without his family. In July 1947, the engagement of Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten to then Princess Elizabeth was announced, and they were married in November. His Royal Highness was a father of four, a grandfather of eight and a great-grandfather of 10.

Her Majesty and His Royal Highness were married for more than 73 years, through which time he was an irreplaceable source of love and support, perhaps easing the heavy burden that is the crown. Her Majesty's remark, which has been quoted often in the last several days, that Prince Philip "has quite simply been my strength and stay all these years," certainly explains the sort of man that he was.

Mr. Speaker, this House remembers His Royal Highness as a Prince, as a consort, as a war hero, as a sportsman, as a conservationist, as a father and as a husband. I offer our deepest sympathies and condolences to Her Majesty the Queen, whose loss we cannot fully know, and to the royal family in their time of bereavement.

Your Majesty, we, your loyal subjects, share absolutely in your sorrow and grief. His Royal Highness may be gone from this earth, but he remains in our memories and in our hearts.

God rest his soul, Mr. Speaker, and God save the Queen.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Calandra has moved that an humble address be presented to Her Majesty the Queen: condolences on the loss of her beloved husband

and consort, His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Orders of the day?

Hon. Paul Calandra: No further business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business, this House stands in recess until 10:15.

The House recessed from 1002 to 1015.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY UNIVERSITÉ LAURENTIENNE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Today I want to ask this government, one more time, to cancel the companies' creditors arrangements that Laurentian University has fallen into. This process does one thing: It determines how many cents on the dollar creditors will get. But the government can see that the assets of Laurentian University are way more than that. It is the bilingual mandate. It is the three cultures. It is the oldest Indigenous university program in our province.

Can you not see what my community is losing because of this government's inaction? Students are missing out on their education, having to switch schools, switch their majors, switch their entire career paths. People are losing their jobs, their paycheques, in the middle of a pandemic, throwing more families into crisis.

Premier Ford, Minister Romano: Vous pouvez arrêter ce carnage de ma communauté dès maintenant. Vous devez prendre vos responsabilités envers la communauté francophone qui fait les frais de votre inaction.

La communauté francophone a droit à des programmes universitaires en français dans le nord de l'Ontario. Chaque programme offert en français—en science politique ou en littérature, en économie ou en histoire—est le fruit de plusieurs années de travail avant d'y avoir accès. Et le gouvernement reste là sans même lever le petit doigt, sans dire un mot, alors que 40 programmes en français disparaissent et des douzaines de professeurs perdent leur emploi. J'ai honte.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's my honour to rise today and pay a special tribute to the team at Lambton Public Health. Unfortunately, negative chatter and misinformation have led many in Sarnia-Lambton to believe that our community is falling behind the vaccination efforts of other communities in the province. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, Public Health Ontario's latest surveillance report on COVID-19 uptake in Ontario reports that thanks to the tireless efforts of Lambton Public Health, the residents of Lambton county are receiving their vaccines

at the sixth-fastest rate of all 34 public health units in the province. In southwestern Ontario, Lambton Public Health has administered more vaccines to residents than every other public health unit of a comparable size. Lambton Public Health has also undertaken the important step of beginning to vaccinate education and child care workers, faith leaders, first responders, border inspection officers, food manufacturing workers and agriculture and farm workers.

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend all of the staff at Lambton Public Health for the tremendous work they have done so far in delivering these life-saving vaccines to the people of Lambton County. Everyone in Lambton county owes a debt of gratitude to Lambton Public Health for the work they are doing—and, I might add, we also have five new pharmacies that are also administering vaccines this week. So, on behalf of all the residents of Lambton county, I say thank you to everyone at Lambton Public Health for all your efforts over the last year.

EVENTS IN BLACK RIVER-MATHESON

Mr. John Vanthof: I would like to take this opportunity to make the House aware of the state of emergency that has been declared by the municipality of Black River-Matheson. When I talked to Mayor Gilles Laderoute, they at that point had three cases of COVID in their municipal workforce, and as a result the entire workforce, the entirety of the public employees of Black River-Matheson, are self-isolating. Other contractors have stepped up to the plate to take over municipal duties because, as you know, in northern Ontario we've had a very warm spring, but we are still expecting snowstorms in Black River-Matheson.

To add to how big an impact this could have, there was an accident last Saturday on Highway 11 in Black River-Matheson that closed the highway for hours and hours and hours. This is the second Saturday in a row that that stretch of highway has been closed.

1020

To the people of Black River-Matheson: Hang in there. Everyone is doing what they can. Mayor Laderoute is keeping us up to date, and I made a commitment to him to keep the Legislature up to date, because at some point they might need further help.

AGRICULTURAL LABOUR POLICY

Mr. Toby Barrett: Across farm country in Haldimand-Norfolk, apart from soil temperatures, soil moisture, weather forecasts and commodity markets, the availability of farm labour and local medical officer of health restrictions weigh heavily on labour-intensive agriculture.

Recently, 250 Norfolk county tractors rode into town for a rally to express their collective frustration at some of the difficulties COVID-19 restrictions are causing for local farmers. The restriction of the movement of temporary foreign workers from Pearson International Airport to three workers per vehicle rather than together in a bus is one such example. This restriction and others, if I refer to

consultant Trish Fournier, is adding a cost of over \$19,000 per farm worker to the 5,000 workers arriving in Haldimand–Norfolk.

As announced in our Ontario budget, \$10 million is available to farmers to purchase PPE, enhance cleaning and disinfection, and redesign work stations to better protect workers. The funding will also help farmers who experience unexpected costs for short-term or temporary housing and transportation as a result of COVID-19 outbreaks. As well, increased flexibility has been built into the program to ensure that it can respond to the emerging issues and risk.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Taras Natyshak: This is a statement that I had hoped to not have to make. I bring forward today, on behalf of my riding and the good people of Essex county, the frustration and anger that has existed and continues to permeate our region due to this government's ineptitude when it comes to dealing with COVID-19. We are now in the third lockdown, one that certainly was preventable.

When we're looking back, the first lockdown was unfortunate, but people understood. The second one was definitely unfortunate. The third one now is sheer negligence. We knew what to do. The answers were around us in other jurisdictions, around cohorting, around protecting seniors in long-term care, around ensuring that smaller class sizes and proper ventilation were made and supporting small businesses and supporting those workers that needed paid sick days. This government has done none of that, and here we are today in a third lockdown that has devastated the small business community in my area.

We will probably never see some of the businesses that had a footprint on our main streets ever again. They've lost hope, and it's strictly, specifically and solely due to the actions and inactions of this government. They are mad. They are absolutely frustrated, and there continues to be a lack of help or any hope coming from this government.

I implore the members of the government to enhance and support the small business supports that are there, make sure the eligibility criteria are broadened and deliver paid sick days for all the workers in this province of Ontario.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson: The Collingwood General and Marine Hospital redevelopment is listed by Infrastructure Ontario in the pre-procurement phase, with an estimated cost between \$200 million and \$499 million. We now know that a request for proposals is targeted for the fall of 2023 and a contract could be signed by 2024. I want to thank the Premier and the Minister of Health for making this happen.

Members will know that a new Collingwood hospital located at a central, easily accessible site on donated land is much preferred by residents of south Georgian Bay than

a rebuild at the existing confined hospital location. I encourage residents to continue fighting for a brand new hospital on Poplar Sideroad. I hope the government will keep an open mind.

My constituents are looking forward to the new state-of-the-art hospital facilities they need and deserve and have long fought for.

BITE OF BRANT

Mr. Will Bouma: Good morning. I rise in the House today to highlight the efforts of Bite of Brant. Organized by the county of Brant agricultural awareness committee, Bite of Brant is an opportunity for local elementary students in grades 4 through 6 to learn about the agri-food industry and the vital role it plays in our local food supply and economy.

Bite of Brant is an initiative which began 26 years ago, and in the past, students would visit the Burford fairgrounds to learn about farming. Last year, the event was cancelled due to the pandemic, but this year, the organizing committee pivoted to a virtual event. The free learning opportunity, run by countless volunteers, ran from April 6 through 9, with over 47 local classes participating. The week's activities included the livestreaming of discussions with area farmers and tours of local agricultural operations, including dairy, beef, chicken, grain crops, sheep and fruit. In addition, the teachers received an extensive list of resources which can be used to further teach the students where their food comes from.

In 2019, Bite of Brant was awarded the Farm and Food Care champion award, recognizing their support for Ontario's farming community. I extend my appreciation to the many involved in the organization of this year's event and their continued focus on the value of Ontario food and farmers.

TRUCKING LICENSING

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Dump truck drivers are essential workers in our province, but the Conservative government is threatening their very livelihood. Drivers of tri-axle dump trucks have explained how changes in what is known as the SPIF regulations are forcing dump truck drivers to make huge investments in buying new equipment and new retrofits for their trucks in a very short amount of time. They have explained to me that many dump truck drivers may not be able to afford this new investment, and they may actually have to pull their trucks off the road.

That is why the NDP is calling on the Conservative government to stand up for dump truck drivers. The Conservative government must stand up for dump truck drivers, bring in reasonable, safe accommodations so that these drivers can continue to contribute to our province.

Small businesses are struggling right now, at no fault of their own. Businesses that were incredibly successful

before COVID-19 are now struggling to make ends meet. And the Conservative government has not only abandoned small businesses, but they're refusing to make further investments to ensure that they survive this pandemic. The Conservative government didn't listen to the experts and they walked us right into this pandemic. The Conservative government now should have brought in additional financial support to small businesses during this most recent lockdown. Instead, they are leaving small businesses out to dry.

That's why the NDP is calling on the Conservative government to act now, invest in small businesses and make sure they have the support that they need to get through this pandemic.

TOURISM

Mr. Norman Miller: Parry Sound–Muskoka is home to thousands of tourism businesses, small and large. As we all know, tourism is one of the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic, and I have been advocating for help for these businesses.

I was pleased to see our government act to support this important part of our economy in the recent budget. Our government has allocated \$100 million for the new Ontario Tourism and Hospitality Small Business Support Grant to help those tourism businesses that were not eligible for the Ontario small business grant. This will include hotels and motels, hunting and fishing camps and children's overnight camps. I look forward to seeing applications for this grant program open soon.

Ontario has allocated another \$100 million for larger tourism businesses that are the anchors of local tourism economies. As well, our government has set aside \$150 million for the staycation tax credit to encourage people to support Ontario tourism businesses as soon as it is safe to do so. We are increasing funding to Ontario's regional tourism organizations, like Explorers' Edge, by \$15 million. We are also supporting resource-based tourism businesses like hunting camps by waiving some licences and crown land fees.

The Minister of Finance is going to join me for a discussion with local chambers of commerce in Parry Sound–Muskoka to go over these and other things, and I thank him for that.

COMMUNITY GRANTS

Mr. Lorne Coe: The Ontario government is investing \$2.9 million through the Inclusive Community Grants Program to support community projects that will keep people of all ages and abilities healthy and engaged across the province.

In my riding, the town of Whitby is receiving \$60,000 to facilitate the evaluation of its age-friendly action plan and expansion of social inclusion programs. Speaker, this new funding will help town staff and council to continue to create opportunities for seniors and people with

disabilities to connect socially from home, something that is of critical importance right now during the pandemic.

1030

In addition, the region of Durham has received funding to develop a series of learning and public education opportunities, and increasing accessibility of public transit for older adults and persons with disabilities.

Through the Inclusive Community Grants Program, we're taking steps to ensure that municipalities like the town of Whitby and the region of Durham and local organizations are able to make our communities more inclusive and accessible. Speaker, it's a great example of what we can achieve when we work together.

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE PHILIP, DUKE OF EDINBURGH

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for a moment of silence in remembrance of His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking the unanimous consent of the House for a moment's silence in remembrance of His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. Agreed? Agreed. Members will please rise.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And may God save the Queen.

Members, please take your seats.

DRAPEAU FRANCO-ONTARIEN FRANCO-ONTARIAN FLAG

Le Président (L'hon. Ted Arnott): J'aimerais que tous les députés remarquent que sur le mur sud de la Chambre derrière moi, le drapeau franco-ontarien a été ajouté à côté de ceux de l'Ontario, du Canada et de notre Assemblée législative. I'd like all members to notice that on the south wall of the chamber behind me, the Franco-Ontarian flag has been added next to those of Ontario, Canada and our Legislative Assembly.

Après accord à cette Chambre le mois dernier, la décision a été prise d'installer le drapeau ici ainsi que sur les terrains de l'Assemblée législative. After agreement in this House last month, the decision was made to install the flag here as well as on the Legislature's grounds.

Le drapeau franco-ontarien est maintenant un symbole officiel de notre province et un symbole qui représente notre dynamique communauté franco-ontarienne. The Franco-Ontarian flag is now an official symbol of our province and one that represents our vibrant Franco-Ontarian community.

Je suis certain que vous êtes aussi heureux que moi de le voir ici alors que nous célébrons et reconnaissons ce nouvel emblème provincial important. I'm sure you're as

pleased as I am to see them here as we celebrate and recognize this new and important provincial emblem.

Merci. Thank you.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Premier. On Friday, Ontario reached a tragic milestone: 4,227 people diagnosed with new cases of COVID. At the time, it was the highest number since the pandemic began. Why would the Premier claim on that same day that “things are looking pretty good”?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Last Wednesday, I think, was the day that we started to fight back in the province of Ontario, after spending a year on the defence, preparing our long-term-care homes, preparing our hospitals, making important reinvestments in the sectors that were so important to ensuring that we got through the first and second waves. Last week, we finally started to fight back by taking the vaccine into the communities that have been most affected, by taking the vaccine to workplaces that have been most affected. The results are encouraging. If I’m not mistaken, over three million vaccines have been delivered to the people of the province of Ontario.

We are fighting back, Mr. Speaker. That’s what the next 28 days are about: They’re about turning the corner. Does that mean there won’t be some difficult days ahead? Of course there will be, but last week marked the time when we finally started to fight back and left the defence behind. We are attacking this virus where it’s hurting people the most.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: This is a crisis that the Ford government marched us into with eyes wide open—until last Wednesday, it seems. Since February, the Premier was warned over and over again by doctors, nurses, hospitals and his own experts that COVID-19 was spreading, that it would hit workers who couldn’t stay home especially hard and that our ICUs would be overwhelmed. He denied it then and he’s still claiming that “things are looking pretty good.”

At what point will the Premier stop the denials and admit that we are in a crisis that he created?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, in fact, what the Premier was referring to was the rate of vaccinations that were proceeding. Over 3.2 million vaccines have already been administered. We are moving forward with that very quickly. The rollout is going very well. There are more and more locations where people can be vaccinated. We just added another 700 pharmacies. We’re up to about 1,400 pharmacies; we should be up to 1,500 by the end of this month. That is what the Premier was speaking about. That

is a good rollout of the vaccination campaign—because we want every person in Ontario who wishes to receive a vaccine to receive one as quickly as possible. We’re doing just that.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: We’ve just learned “good news”: We’ve just learned that another 15 people died yesterday. I don’t call that good news. There are over 600 people struggling to breathe in our ICUs. Thousands more have seen desperately needed surgeries postponed. Things are not looking pretty good.

Will the Premier stop denying the crisis, admit that we need to do much more and provide the resources and measures we need, whether that’s paid sick days, 24/7 vaccinations, paid vaccination time or military personnel?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Through you, Mr. Speaker: I would say to the member opposite, what you seem to be denying is the fact that this is happening across Canada. This isn’t just happening in Ontario; look at what’s happening in BC, in Alberta and in Saskatchewan. This is not just happening in Ontario.

The variants of concern are now the dominant strain in Ontario. We’ve been listening to our health experts every step along the way and making the adjustments that we’ve needed to. We’ve added over \$5 billion to our hospitals in the last year alone.

We’re making sure that we create the added capacity. That’s why we’ve taken the steps that we’ve taken to declare the emergency and have the stay-at-home order in effect, and all of the other steps that we’re taking to bring more people in, health care personnel; to ramp down the scheduled surgeries, which is unfortunate, but sadly necessary right now; and make sure that we can do the client patient transfers so that we can use our entire health system, the entire capacity that exists in the system—to make sure that everyone in Ontario who needs to be in an intensive care bed will be able to do so.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Last Friday, when the Premier was asked about the record-high amount of COVID-19 cases in Ontario, the highest since this pandemic has begun, with over 4,200 cases reported in a day, the Premier responded by saying, “Ontario is doing pretty well right now.”

Countless people are sick. COVID-19 patients are filling our ICUs. Small businesses are struggling to get by. Our largest school boards are closed to in-person learning and the entire province is in a third lockdown. That doesn’t sound like Ontario is doing pretty well; it sounds like a disaster that this Premier led us straight into.

My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier finally admit that he failed Ontario with his response to the pandemic?

1040

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Once again, through you, Speaker, to the member opposite, it is a myth that the Premier made a suggestion with respect to the rate of COVID infections in Ontario. What he was referring to that was going well were the levels of vaccinations.

However, having said that, we certainly recognize that there is concern in our hospitals and our intensive care units right now. That's why we are creating the capacity. We anticipate that with the ramping down of surgeries, with the redeployment of staff and the ability to transfer patients from one hot-spot area to another that might not be in a hot-spot area, we will be able to create between 700 and 1,000 beds to make sure that we can deal with the incoming influx of patients. In fact, by the end of this week, we anticipate having created 350 net new spots. So we are dealing with it, we are creating capacity and we are making sure that every Ontarian who needs an intensive care bed will get one.

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Back to the Premier: Ontario's Friday record high was just beat on Sunday, with another record day of COVID-19 cases, with over 4,400 cases reported in a single day. Ontario ranks eighth lowest amongst provinces and territories for per capita vaccinations. We are in our third province-wide lockdown since the pandemic has begun. Despite this all, the Premier thinks that Ontario is doing pretty well.

I can tell you that in my community of Brampton, folks are not doing so well. Essential workers risk their lives every single day going to work so others can work from home, and they're becoming sick because of it. But the Premier chose not to listen to the experts. He chose not to bring in paid sick days. He chose not to adequately fund our health care system, and this is the result.

Why, in the face of overwhelming evidence that it can save lives, is the Premier refusing to bring in paid sick days?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Let me remind the member opposite and all the people in Ontario that there are now 20 days of paid sick days available to every single worker in the province of Ontario. In fact, the very first initiative this government brought in was job-protected leave. If you're a worker in self-isolation, if you're in quarantine, if you're a mom or a dad that has to stay home and look after a son or a daughter because schools are closed, you can't be fired for that. We also brought in job-protected leave for anyone who has to go and get a vaccination. We were the first jurisdiction in Canada to do that.

It is clearly a disservice to all workers in the province when a member stands up like this and says that there are no paid sick days for workers. More than 300,000 workers in Ontario are receiving the federal benefit. We tell all workers: Go to canada.ca/covid-19 and you can qualify for sick day pay.

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Back to the Premier: Despite being in a lockdown, which is meant to stop the spread of COVID-19, today countless workers woke up and had to make the dreadful decision between going to work sick or paying their bills, because their Premier continues to refuse to bring in paid sick days for workers. The Premier continues to ignore the evidence that states that workplaces are some of the highest areas of spread of COVID-19 and one of the best tools we have to stop this spread is paid sick days.

So I ask the Premier: Will you continue to fail Ontario's workers, or will you act now, bring in paid sick days and save lives?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Mr. Speaker, here they go again. There are four weeks of paid sick days available to every single worker in the province of Ontario. The members opposite need to serve their constituents, serve the people of Ontario, and let them know that they can go to canada.ca/covid-19. In fact, it was this Premier, the Premier of Ontario, who worked with the other provincial and territorial leaders and the Prime Minister to bring in \$1.1 billion worth of paid sick days. There are still three quarters of that money remaining.

Every member who does not tell constituents that paid sick days are available is doing a disservice to all workers in the province of Ontario.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. Ontario's surgical backlog presently sits at a quarter of a million delayed procedures. Some 250,000 Ontarians have had their surgery delayed. Some had their surgery already booked only to have it cancelled with no new dates in sight.

Starting today, the government directed most hospitals to cancel all non-emergency surgeries. That directive was issued on the same day that the Premier said that Ontario is doing great and everything is fine. Is this what the Premier wants to tell those 250,000 Ontarians waiting for delayed surgery, that Ontario is doing great right now?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, the Premier is very concerned about having to cancel these surgeries, as am I, but unfortunately it's sadly necessary.

What we need to do right now is to make sure that people who are coming into hospital with COVID are going to be able to be treated.

There are younger and younger people coming into intensive care right now. One hospital CEO told me on Friday that she has a 22-year-old in intensive care right now. We need to be able to create those spaces so that these people will be able to live.

Now, if someone needs emergency surgery, if it's life-and limb-saving surgery for cancer or whatever else it happens to be, they will receive that surgery. Other surgeries will unfortunately have to be cancelled, but they are not being forgotten.

We did put \$300 million into our budget this year in order to be able to deal with this backlog in surgeries, and we anticipate getting back to that as quickly as possible once we have dealt with this surge in intensive care beds. But none of these people will be forgotten. Every surgery is going to be important and we will do it. Unfortunately, because of the variants of concern and the surge in intensive care, we simply have to do it right now to save lives.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: That's not very reassuring to the people who are left waiting. Last week, I met with members of the Canadian Cancer Survivor Network. They shared the stats on the number of cancer patients and on the number of pre-diagnosed people waiting for their cancer diagnostics. They shared the number of weeks and months that they wait for a rescheduled appointment, surgery or procedure.

The first wave had shown us that delaying non-emergency surgery is leading to more Ontarians being diagnosed with stage 4 cancer due to the delay in every step of their cancer journey. It did not have to be that way, Speaker. We should have prevented the overcrowding of our ICUs.

Will the Premier admit that Ontario is not doing great right now, that everything is not fine?

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, we've taken steps since the beginning of this pandemic last year to create over 3,100 beds to be able to deal with increases in our hospitals, and we've also increased our intensive care capacity by 14%. There is more that we need to do, and that's what we're doing with the orders that have been brought and the declaration that it was necessary to step back on these surgeries.

Certainly, it is a concern, and that is something that we want to get back to as quickly as we can, but Ontario's doctors also support this. If I could just quote from the release that was issued by the Ontario Medical Association: "Ontario's doctors support the government's decision to halt non-emergency surgeries as an unfortunate but necessary step to reduce the death toll from COVID-19." The OMA "said the order is necessary to preserve capacity in the health care system to treat not just COVID patients but others with critical illnesses or injuries."

That is the unfortunate state that we're in right now. This is what needs to be done to preserve lives, despite the incredible capacity that has already been created, and we are going to create more capacity. This is not going to be a pause in surgeries for months or years. This is in order to deal with the critical surge that we have right now from the COVID variants, which is happening across the country.

WOMEN'S ISSUES

Mr. Jim McDonell: My question is to the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues. Speaker, COVID has had a social and economic impact on all

Ontarians, but it has impacted women across the province the most. Some 81% of women make up our health care and social assistance workforce. There are also many women in retail, education, child care and the early years sectors.

Our Minister of Tourism has also talked extensively about those in the tourism and hospitality industries.

If it isn't women who have been on the front lines working, it is those who have been taking extra caregiving duties for those kids and the loved ones in their life.

The bottom line is, we need to have a plan to support these women, who are the heroes behind the pandemic. We cannot leave them behind.

1050

Speaker, can the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues tell the House what the government is doing for women across Ontario, especially during this pandemic?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I want to thank the member for being such a strong supporter and advocate for women in his riding.

Speaker, it is true that the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women. Our government recognizes that and is doing something about it. Our government has been steadfast in increasing women's economic empowerment and getting more women into the workforce.

Budget 2021 has only reaffirmed that commitment to support women right now and post-pandemic. Just last week, I was with the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development and others to speak about our government's initiatives to get more women into trucking. That's just one of many industries.

In our budget, we are investing \$117 million to assist women, racialized individuals, Indigenous peoples, youth and people with disabilities, who are facing the highest rates of unemployment during the pandemic. As the member stated, many women have unfortunately lost their jobs, but initiatives like the Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit will have an incredible impact on women who have lost their jobs and who want to upgrade their skills to get into new, rewarding careers.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you to the minister for that response. It is reassuring to know that the government is focusing on protecting those who have been impacted the most by this pandemic, including women. Initiatives like the job training tax credit will be very helpful for women and others who have lost their jobs in my riding and across the province.

But one area that women have taken extra responsibility in during this pandemic has been child care. Many women have left the workforce for that exact reason. To get more women into the workforce and keep moms and dads working means providing choice for child care. I have heard this many times in my riding as I have farmers and other jobs that are not typically 9 to 5, but rather odd hours

or shift work. I also experienced this first-hand with my grandchildren.

Speaker, can the minister please explain to my constituents and the House how the government is helping working parents, especially moms, who need to get back into the workforce across the province?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you again to the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry for this important question.

Not a single round table goes by that child care isn't discussed. That is why our Minister of Education has made child care a priority. I commend him on his work of building 30,000 child care spaces in Ontario.

Another way we are helping parents today is by providing more flexibility. Through the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education, we are expanding the CARE tax credit and the support for parents' funding. These initiatives will give working moms and dads choice in the child care that works for them. This also includes nurses, PSWs and many others who are doing shift work, who may need care for their children in the evenings.

Speaker, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to child care. Our government trusts parents to make the decision that works best for them and their child care needs. The Minister of Education and I will continue to fight for those moms and dads, and work together to find solutions so more women can get into the workforce, because our government knows there is no—

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

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Doly Begum: My question is to the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. Frankly, we've been at this for the last couple of months. The minister knows exactly what I'm going to ask; I know exactly what the minister will respond. We're talking about equity in Scarborough.

I'm just going to cut to the chase and say that Scarborough has not been treated equally or equitably. We're not getting an equitable distribution of vaccines. So I'll start with that today.

On April 7, the Premier announced that essential workers, education workers and many other factory workers—technically, all essential workers and those living in high-risk communities with postal codes that are highlighted—will have access to vaccines. Many of those postal codes that are high-risk are in my community of Scarborough, yet I'm hearing from education workers, from factory workers, from grocery workers and from many others in my community that they have no idea when and where this rollout will be taking place.

We have learned from the Scarborough Health Network that the delay in this rollout and the mobile clinics are due to the lack of supply and clear communication from this government. Why is this government once again failing the most vulnerable people in our province through another poorly planned vaccine rollout?

Hon. Christine Elliott: First of all, I would have to say that I disagree with the statement made by the honourable member. Phase 2 of our vaccine rollout is going to be facing older adults, those at risk of serious illness and those in hot-spot areas. We know that COVID-19 has disproportionately affected certain neighbourhoods. We've identified postal codes in different units. In fact, there are 15 postal code areas in Scarborough that have been identified, that will be treated as hot-spot areas, that will have more pop-up and mobile vaccination centres, as well as those that are available through our booking centre and in our pharmacies. Two of the locations that are already going to be receiving extra volumes of vaccines are, in Scarborough North, the Taibu Community Health Centre and, in Scarborough Southwest, the Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities.

We are paying attention to those areas that are at higher risk. They are going to be receiving more vaccines—all of the areas in the hot spots will, because we know that if we don't deal with the hot-spot areas, that risk of transmission is going to increase, so the healthier the people are in those communities, the healthier people will be across the entire province.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to get the facts straight, because, for example, Taibu is actually two or three buses from people living in my community in Scarborough Southwest. Scarborough is quite large. There are six ridings in Scarborough. We have over 650,000 people, and the sad reality is that some of the Conservative ridings are having these mobile clinics and we're left behind.

Frankly, all of Scarborough has been delayed more than other parts of Ontario. I want everyone across the province to get vaccines—don't get me wrong—but I want my community, the people who are most vulnerable, to be getting those vaccines as well. We shouldn't be eight days, two weeks, three weeks—people are confused. The websites don't even have any slots available. That's not fair. That's not being treated equitably.

Speaker, many in my community are worried sick between not having paid sick days or protection in their workplaces and unsafe classrooms. Families, teachers, workers—quite frankly, everybody is facing uncertainty regarding their livelihood, their health. On Friday, we heard the Premier say, "Ontario is doing pretty well"—unbelievable. Ontario is caught in the epicentre of the pandemic in Canada, and for those of us seeing the third wave unfold, that's the reality that I'm not sure the Premier is facing.

Speaker, when can the people of Scarborough—especially those who urgently need to be protected, like essential workers—rely on the vaccine rollout of this government? And if they cannot give me a date, then please tell us: Is there an actual—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you.
The Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, Speaker, what the honourable member has suggested is simply not the case. In fact, Scarborough is receiving an equitable volume of

vaccines. In fact, there have been 15 areas, 15 postal codes identified in Scarborough, as high as any other part of Ontario. They are receiving an equitable number of vaccines. People are being vaccinated. We are making sure that we have pop-up areas, that we have mobile vaccine testing, that we can go to apartment buildings, that we can go to seniors' homes to make sure that everybody who wants a vaccine is going to get one.

So any suggestion that Scarborough is not receiving their fair share is simply not the case. We are treating everybody across Ontario equally. We're targeting the hot spots, because we know that because of certain determinants, people need to receive these vaccines as soon as possible. That is for the benefit of everyone in Ontario, and certainly for the benefit of the people in those communities, and Scarborough is receiving its fair share.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is to the Minister of Health. Last week, I asked the minister about paid vaccination leave for front-line workers in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood and places like Brampton, which are hot spots, so that people can take the time from work to get vaccinated and not have to choose between the health of their families and feeding their families. This is a choice that they shouldn't have to make in a pandemic. I essentially heard that this was not something that you were looking into.

The government has said—the Premier himself has said that that everything is on the table and he would do anything possible to save lives. Paid vaccination leave is not a new idea. Jurisdictions like Saskatchewan and New York have introduced a form of special vacation leave to allow workers to get the vaccinations during working hours.

We know that those that are affected the most are people in diverse communities, who oftentimes are the essential workers without the option of not working. They have to work to keep food on their table and a roof over their head, yet they need this vaccine because they are the most affected by the pandemic in terms of infection rates. You know this. You have that data.

1100

So I am putting paid vaccination leave on the table today. Will your government do the same and step up so that these workers—

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

Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I thank the member opposite for that question. Let me begin by congratulating the people of Ontario: More than three million vaccinations have been given out to date, and every day, we are setting new records. As the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health said earlier, we announced yesterday that 700 more pharmacies are going to be delivering vaccinations. That brings the total to about 1,500.

My message to all employers and to all workers: Please continue to work together. We're going to get through

COVID-19. There is light at the end of the tunnel. By the end of the next 28 days, 40% of adults in the province of Ontario are going to be vaccinated. That's great news. I look forward, in the supplementary, to talking about being the first province in Canada and one of the first in all of North America to offer job-protected leave for those workers to get vaccinated.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Job-protected leave ensures that people can't get fired when they get sick, but it doesn't offer them a continuation of their salary so that they can stay home and get well and continue to feed their families. It's not enough.

Why is your government slapping itself on the back for vaccination rates? You're lagging behind other provinces. Ontario often leads in Canada, so don't slap yourself on the back as if you're doing a great job in terms of vaccination rates.

Why is this government so slow to act? Our front-line health care workers are doing all that they can to fight the devastating third wave, so why isn't the government doing what it can do? The Toronto Star reports, through data from Toronto Public Health, that 68% of workplace outbreaks come from offices, warehouses, construction sites, food production plants, and these workers need protection. So my question is, will you deploy the rapid testing that is available in Ontario's factories and schools, as well as N95 masks, to keep workers safe?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Let me again begin by thanking and congratulating the people of Ontario—more than 3.2 million vaccinations to date. That is how we're going to defeat COVID-19. But the health and well-being of every single person in this province is our government's top priority. In fact, that's why on Thursday, we launched an inspection campaign. Hundreds of inspectors went into warehouses, food processing plants, distribution centres, big box stores, malls. On Friday and Saturday, 260 sites were visited. We issued a number of orders and 16 tickets to employers and to managers and supervisors.

Everyone has to continue doing more, following public health guidance. For every employer out there, they need to go to ontario.ca/covidsafety—more than 200 resources in multiple languages are available to them. And I'm proud to say that more than 5.5 million rapid tests have been deployed to workplaces.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a question for the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. This pandemic has demonstrated the need for made-in-Ontario solutions. Our government has taken extraordinary measures to protect people and their businesses. The enabler behind many of these measures has been the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, which has been an engine behind our pandemic warehouse in particular.

Can the Minister of Government and Consumer Services explain how her ministry has ensured that we

have the supplies we need to continue the fight against COVID-19?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you to the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry for that important question.

I want to share with you that, since the beginning of the pandemic, my Ministry of Government and Consumer Services has been partnering together with a multitude of ministries to make sure we have an all-of-government approach to take action on this front. As you know, we set up Supply Ontario, we partnered with Ontario Together and we leveraged made-in-Ontario procurements to fill our pandemic warehouses.

As we announced last week, Speaker, Ontario-made N95 masks are now rolling off the line at 3M Canada's Brockville plant, a milestone in a major federal-provincial procurement of 55 million respirators annually to protect front-line heroes and create good jobs for years to come. All of Canada will benefit from the stable domestic supply of N95s, and here in Ontario, my ministry is working quickly to get these important pieces of PPE to those who need them.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: This is great news to hear. Quality PPE is essential to keeping our province running and protecting the health of our front line.

We know that the necessary public health measures have forced many businesses to adjust their operations, and this has been felt hard by families and companies across the province. Beyond PPE, getting money into their pockets has been a major priority for this government, as is getting needles into arms. To do this, we've needed robust online platforms, call centres and transfer payment systems.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Government and Consumer Services explain how her ministry is providing this kind of service infrastructure across the pandemic response?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I am very pleased to share with everyone in the House and those watching today that since March 2020, my Ministry of Government and Consumer Services has worked with 15 ministries to launch 28 emergency COVID-19 programs worth more than \$4 billion in funding through Transfer Payment Ontario. This includes \$1.47 billion to small businesses to date, with a second round of payments coming soon; and the Support for Learners program, providing an additional \$300 million to support students in learning. We will also be supporting the tourism sector with a program that will be announced by the end of this month.

Mr. Speaker, we have also supported the Ministry of Health on the vaccine rollout. I can tell you, last week, we hit a daily record: Well over 300,000 appointments were made in one day, and we heard about the number of vaccines that have been realized to date.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario ministries are coming together to execute an all-of-government approach. I'm pleased with the efforts at the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services. We're protecting health, jobs—

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

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, the Premier promised that when it came to fighting COVID-19, he'd take a fire hose, put it right down on top of every hot spot in the province and stop at nothing to support these communities. But, today, CBC is reporting that for hot spots in Hamilton, where cases are spreading like wildfire, the Conservatives aren't even willing to send a garden hose.

CBC's review of the data identified seven postal code zones that have felt greater impact from COVID-19, as measured by the province's official criteria. But for some reason, they're not listed as hot spots by this government.

My question is, why is the Premier still playing with matches when hot-spot communities like Hamilton are on the verge of becoming an inferno?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for the question. In fact, the original hot spots were identified based on historical data, transmission records and hospitalizations. We are working to deal with those hot spots right now, as well as the rest of Ontario. But saying that, we want to make sure that we can get all of the adults, first of all, over age 50 in the hot-spot areas vaccinated in Toronto and Peel areas. There will be adults over age 18. But that doesn't mean that other hot spots won't be identified as we go further. If there are surges, there is a small reserve that we hold back to be able to deal with some of those surges and some of those additional hot spots. We'll certainly deal with them readily as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It's not just Hamilton that's been left behind by the Premier. In Windsor and Essex county, we have higher case counts, higher positivity rates and higher hospitalizations than some of the Premier's other hot-spot areas, but we've still been left out in the cold and on our own. Thanks to Dr. Christopher Leighton, who made us aware that our Chief Medical Officer of Health stated this week that we are still weeks away from addressing people in our region in Windsor and Essex county with chronic health conditions and disabilities. This is ableism to the largest extent.

1110

We saw what happened last year when the Conservatives refused to support our region: Case counts and outbreaks spiked and we had some of the highest numbers in the province. The variants are spreading too fast for us to be ignoring communities again.

When are the hot spots, like Windsor, Essex, Hamilton and everywhere else, finally going to get the support that this Premier keeps promising but keeps failing to deliver?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would say that all areas of Ontario are being considered. Some areas, Toronto and Peel right now, account for approximately 60% of

COVID-19 transmission. It's obviously necessary to lessen the transmission in those areas for the benefit of people across Ontario.

With respect to Windsor-Essex, I know that the member will be very pleased to know that a planning grant has been given for the creation of a new hospital in that area, which is going to help people. Of course, it's going to take a while to get a hospital built, but the people of Windsor-Essex are being considered. This is a major development and a major expenditure that the government of Ontario wants to make in the Windsor-Essex area.

But we are dealing with hot spots across the province. That's why the stay-at-home order was declared and the state of emergency, that's why the surgeries are being ramped back, that's why we're redeploying staff and that's why we're transferring patients: to make sure that across the entire province, regardless of where you live, if you need to be in an intensive care spot, you will have one across the province of Ontario. Everyone is being treated fairly—everyone in every part of this province.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. John Fraser: My question is to the Premier. For the first time, Ontario hit over 600 patients in ICU, and that number is going to continue to rise. We've had more than 4,000 cases in the last two days. Throughout this pandemic, the government has been two weeks behind, two steps behind this virus—reacting to it more than planning for it.

Last Friday, the Premier said that we have mobile units as we speak going out there right now to get people vaccinated in high-priority neighbourhoods. Yet, members of the vaccine taskforce admitted it's going to take a while to get those things going, and local public health units—well, nobody told them that announcement was being made. They were caught by surprise.

So Speaker, through you, to the Premier: Why were the plans to deploy mobile units not made months before? And why did the Premier give people the impression that they were out there in neighbourhoods right away to do vaccinations when they clearly were not?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Health to reply.

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, plans have been made to deal with the increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases since the beginning of this pandemic, since the very beginning. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been placed into creating 3,100 new hospital spaces and an increase of 14% in our intensive care facilities. We have been listening to the medical experts at every step along the way.

When the case came forward—we're dealing with something different with respect to these variants of concern—we have been listening to that from the experts. We've been following the modelling data. We have been taking steps to be proactive to deal with this situation. That's what we've done every step along the way. That's why we started the emergency shutdown a week or so ago.

That's why we then followed up with the state of emergency and the stay-at-home order, with the steps that we're taking to create that capacity. We are going to create 700 to 1,000 more spaces in our hospitals, including 350 net new spaces by the end of this week.

We have been listening and dealing with the situation. COVID is moving fast and we are moving fast too. We know we need to be nimble. We know we need to be—

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

And the supplementary question.

Mr. John Fraser: With all due respect, Minister, Ontario's doctors, Ontario's nurses, Ontario public officers of health had to run a campaign publicly to say, "We need you to do this," three weeks after they told you to do a lockdown. So that's not nimble.

This morning, CBC reported that five neighbourhoods have been deemed hot spots despite their COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations and death rates being below the provincial average. Hot-spot neighbourhoods are given priority access to vaccines. Four of these neighbourhoods are in government-held ridings. These postal codes were selected even though they experienced less impact from COVID-19, less hospitalizations and less deaths than many other neighbourhoods. For example, a postal code region in Kanata, a riding of a government minister, is deemed a hot spot despite lower rates of hospitalization and death than some 300 other neighbourhoods in Ontario.

So, Speaker, through you, can the Premier explain to Ontarians how these four postal codes were selected, despite not meeting the criteria to be deemed a hot spot?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Speaker, I would say to the member opposite, through you, that any suggestion that any postal codes were selected for any reason other than the fact that they were hot spots and experiencing high rates of transmission is really beneath you. It is really, honestly beneath you.

We have been listening to the doctors, we have been watching the transmission records. We know that those hot spots that we've identified are areas that are having high transmission. That is how the decision is made about the postal codes that we are selecting to receive extra doses of vaccine.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Jim McDonell: My question goes to the Associate Minister of Transportation. Speaker, we need to recognize the importance of building transit that meets the needs of future generations. As we consider the expected population growth for the GTA, critical transit infrastructure will be necessary to connect people to their jobs, homes and families.

Last summer this government passed two pieces of legislation to build transit faster and to adopt a new, modern approach to building new stations better. Today, the government has identified the first two subway transit-oriented communities. Could the minister please speak about the significance of this news?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you to the member for the question. We are making incredible progress on our four priority subway projects. But we are not only building faster. We are taking action to build the right way through a thoughtful, integrated approach based on smart planning principles. Today, we shared preliminary plans with the city of Toronto to build two proposed transit-oriented communities located at the future East Harbour transit hub and the Corktown station along our Ontario Line. This is the first step in bringing to life our shared vision of more housing, more jobs and more community spaces within walking distance of reliable and fast public transit.

Mr. Speaker, we have a unique opportunity to build stations and complete communities that truly make sense for the hard-working people of Toronto, and we are working closely with the city of Toronto to get it done.

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

Mr. Jim McDonnell: Thank you to the minister for that answer. I am pleased to see that this government is taking steps to advance these important infrastructure projects. I also recognize that the province has committed to working closely with our municipal partners to ensure collaboration.

While it's important that the government partners come to the table, we also know that the public and stakeholders have a big role to play in the success of these infrastructure programs. Could the minister please share how this government plans to involve the communities that will be served by these proposed transit-oriented communities?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Again, thank you very much to the member for the question. The future East Harbour transit hub and Corktown station were chosen as the first transit-oriented communities for a reason. The two sets of preliminary proposals would offer current residents and future generations a great quality of life, with better connections to what matters most.

As set out in the Ontario Transit-Oriented Communities Program, we will work closely with the public to understand the unique needs of every single, individual community. And I cannot stress enough our commitment to working with the city, heritage experts and Indigenous partners on a thoughtful plan to commemorate the rich history of the first Parliament site, where a future Corktown station will be located.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm excited to share that we expect to launch the public consultations in the summer and fall of this year.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: My question is for the Premier. A few days ago, the Premier told Ontarians that the province "is doing pretty well right now." "Doing pretty well" is not what anyone on the front lines has said. In fact, London's N6A postal code has the highest COVID-19 positivity rate in the province—the highest—yet this government refuses to declare it a hot spot. Wasting time will cost people their lives.

Last week, the leader of the official opposition and I, along with members from London–Fanshawe and London West, met with parents and educators. Educators like Sandra are on the front line and tell me they've never felt more unsafe or more scared, while Scott said the government's "empty promises of enhanced safety protocols have not come to fruition."

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Speaker, how can the Premier tell parents, teachers, education workers and kids that he believes they're safe enough right now?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We have been working closely with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, who has said that schools have been safe in Ontario, but recognizing fully, as the member opposite has rightly pointed out, that rising community case numbers are most concerning to the province and are creating great challenges to our health capacity.

In the words of Dr. Kurji in York, he said, "I know we've been under a lot of pressure to try to close those schools. However, we believe that our schools in York region have a lower level of transmission occurring largely due to all the processes that have been put in place."

When you ask medical experts, including Dr. Mackie in London, he said, "Transmission in schools is exceedingly rare in our area, that's likely the case in other places as well ... it was likely in the community."

At the end of the day, Speaker, we put in place a plan with an aim to keep schools safe. That is our number one priority. The rising case numbers in Ontario raise great concerns to all of us, and we're working with the Chief Medical Officer of Health to make sure that our families can be safe through the third wave.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary? The member for Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: My question is to the Premier. Sudbury is still trailing when it comes to vaccinations, Speaker. And due to the number of COVID cases in Sudbury, all Sudbury area schools have been closed since March 15. Fast-forward to today, it's four weeks later and Sudbury schools are still closed indefinitely.

This weekend, the Minister of Education told all schools across the province they had better plan to be open; however, when he announced the April break vaccination registration for education workers, he excluded Sudbury as one of the priority areas. It's going to be pretty hard to open if none of the teachers get a vaccine, Speaker.

My question to the Premier is, does the Premier still believe that "Ontario is doing pretty well right now," and how can he claim that schools are still safe?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I guess it bears repeating what this Premier was referring to was vaccination rates, not in terms of the number of COVID cases. In terms of vaccination rates, we are doing very well: 3.2 million doses have been administered. We anticipate by the end of

April, 40% of Ontario's adults will already have been vaccinated.

I understand that in the London area, for example, 45 new pharmacies were opened up yesterday to provide the AstraZeneca vaccine. That's to make sure that we can deal with the vaccinations in as many locations as possible, from the mass vaccination clinics to the primary care offices to the pharmacies to the pop-up clinics and mobile clinics. Everyone who wants to receive a vaccine in Ontario will be able to receive one, especially with the creation of these new pharmacies that are now available to provide the vaccines—45 additional ones in the London area.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: My question is to the Premier. Hundreds of thousands of essential workers going into work during a fierce third wave of COVID-19 have been abandoned by this Premier and his government. Patients are showing up at emergency rooms younger and sicker, and many of them got sick at work.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier can't keep getting this wrong. Our vaccination efforts need to be focused on the people we know are acquiring COVID at work and are spreading it—our valuable essential workers. It's time Ontario join other provinces in vaccinating essential workers at risk during an outbreak.

How much longer will this Premier and this government make essential workers risk their health? Where is the Premier's plan to ensure the thousands of essential workers who have been bearing the brunt of this pandemic get vaccinated before it's too late?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Mr. Speaker, once again, congratulations to more than 3.2 million people in the province of Ontario who got a needle in their arm. We are moving mountains to ensure that the people of Ontario get vaccinated as quickly as we get supply through the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, we are moving to vaccinate essential workers in those hot spots, but I want the member opposite to know, and all members, that the health and safety of every single worker is our government's top priority. That's why we hired 100 more additional Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development inspectors to go into workplaces. That brings Ontario's number of inspectors to the largest amount in provincial history. And, Mr. Speaker, the opposition parties voted against that.

To date, as of yesterday, I am proud of our inspectors. They've done 46,000 workplace inspections to protect the health and safety of every single worker.

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

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Mr. Speaker, every day we see more and more stories of confusion and chaos when it comes to the Premier's non-plan to vaccinate the province. Last week's declaration by the Premier that everyone aged 18 and over in the designated hot spots can get vaccinated

caught public health units and even health ministry staff by surprise. No arrangements had been made for people younger than 50 in those hot zones to book appointments, yet there was the Premier telling everyone 18-plus in hot spots that they could get vaccinated—again, no plan; again, chaos and confusion; again, playing with the health and safety of Ontarians.

Mr. Speaker, over one year into this, why does this government continue to fail Ontarians by having absolutely no plan, no strategy, and as we can see clearly now, no idea how to handle this pandemic?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, our vaccination plan has been highly successful, with over 3.2 million vaccines already having been administered. Our booking tool has already booked another 2.3 million vaccines. In fact, we are already booked to the end of April into the 1st of May so that every vaccine that we're receiving is accounted for, and people have a response for it. This is rolling out across the province.

We have conversations every other day with all the public health unit public officers of health as well as the hospital CEOs. They are very well aware of what the plan is and they are working in their own regions to do the vaccines in the way that seems best to them, including making sure that they have a plan for any vaccines that have not been delivered by the end of the day if people have not been able to show up for their appointments or whatever. They have a system to make sure that every single vaccine can be used by the next person in lineups being a front-facing person, a medical officer, or a person who is delivering front-line patient care. So we are using every vaccine. None of it is being wasted.

Again, as I said, we have 2.3 million more doses booked and more people to receive the vaccine so that—

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

The next question.

NORTHERN HEALTH SERVICES

SERVICES DE SANTÉ DU NORD

Mr. Guy Bourgoïn: Good morning. Bonjour, monsieur le Président. Ma question est pour le premier ministre.

In a letter sent to the Premier, the mayors of the five largest cities in northern Ontario are demanding that this Conservative government put a brake on their public health cuts and their intent to fold 34 public health units into 10 large entities. As the mayors of North Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Thunder Bay, Sudbury and Timmins write, the centralization and cuts "will immediately and dramatically reduce our province's public health capacity."

Premier, we are in the middle of a third wave that you failed to prevent. Mayors are demanding to stop cutting health services in northern Ontario. Will you listen?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Yes, of course, we'll listen. We understand the work that the public health units are doing

is very important and has been important since the beginning of the pandemic. They are our partners in working through our plan because they know their own units best. They know where people live and what's the best place for them to receive vaccines, whether it's at pharmacies, whether it's in mass vaccination clinics or a combination.

In fact, we've also helped them financially. We have provided \$212 million in mitigation funding to public health units in both 2020 and 2021 to ensure that municipal adjustments remain capped at 10%. We're also providing public health units with an additional \$100 million this year to address extraordinary costs related to COVID-19, support the rollout of the provincial vaccination plan and maintain critical public health programs and services. So, yes, we are supporting public health units throughout the province.

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

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Speaker, in the fall of 2019, prior to the onset of the pandemic, the Premier's Conservative government sought to cut provincial public health funding so all municipalities would pay 30% of costs.

C'est assez évident aujourd'hui, en pleine troisième vague de la COVID-19, que les coupures ciblées aux services les plus essentiels, comme la santé publique, mettent en péril la vie des Ontariens. Les bureaux de santé publique du Nord couvrent déjà des régions très vastes, ce qui cause présentement des problèmes, entre autres, pour le déploiement des cliniques de vaccination.

Ma question est très simple : le premier ministre croit-il que sauver une poignée d'argent vaut plus que l'accès à la santé et le bien-être de la vie des résidents du nord de l'Ontario?

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, the member is speaking about ancient history. We've moved on since 2019. We made sure that we capped with mitigation funding to make sure that the public health units, both in 2020 and 2021, did not have any increase at more than 10%.

1130

We've also recognized the importance of the work that we're doing, and even before COVID-19 started, we asked Mr. Jim Pine to come in to speak to municipalities, to speak to public health units, to understand what we needed to do to modernize our public health care system—which is something that was pointed out by the Auditor General on several occasions. We were working towards that, and once we're through the worst part of this pandemic, we will be going back again—Mr. Pine will be completing his consultations with municipalities, and decisions will be made then about what needs to be done.

There's no question, we very much value the work that is being done by our public health units right now in terms of testing and vaccination.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Deputy Premier. I have a lot of respect for the Deputy Premier, but here's what we have. The Premier created the impression

last week that mobile units were out there, fanning across, ready to do 18-plus in areas. He had a pharmacy rollout that didn't target hot spots, didn't go into Peel, didn't go into Scarborough, didn't go into northwest Toronto, and then the second tranche of that didn't go into places like the centre of Ottawa or Vanier. Then, on top of that, we had the region of Peel being offered 5,000 vaccines for Amazon, one business, that were turned down. And now we have this—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Mr. John Fraser: What I mentioned about that postal code—I know that postal code. It has Scotiabank Place, it has large businesses; the data doesn't show it.

I'm asking you two things: Can you please communicate to the people of Ontario clearly why you made these decisions, and can you commit to giving the opposition a technical briefing about your vaccine rollout, so that we can understand the decisions you're making, what the data—

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

Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Yes, of course, we're pleased to provide a technical briefing on the vaccination plan and the vaccination rollout. It's all being based on the clinical evidence and the data. We rely on the public health units to provide us with that information. We see the daily totals. We see where they're coming from. That's why we're placing the vaccination units where they are.

We have mobile and pop-up testing. As a matter of fact, in certain parts of Toronto, in one of the Liberal members' ridings, they were canvassing apartment buildings. They went through several apartment buildings, knocking on people's doors. If people weren't home, they left them a message that said, "We are coming back tomorrow, and we will come back to vaccinate you." As a result of that, over three quarters of the building showed up to be vaccinated. So any suggestion that we're not moving forward with that is not the case. We are proceeding with that.

We are going into workplaces and we are going into places of worship to make sure that people can receive the vaccines they need.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question? The member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

Ms. Mitzi Hunter: Back to the Deputy Premier: Urgent action is needed now. We are facing a triage in our hospital system. This is a horror for those doctors who have to make that decision. We are encroaching on patient rights by transferring them without consent to save their lives. We understand that sending vaccines to green zones in the same amounts as those in grey zones will not solve the problem, will not get us out of lockdown when we need to. We must prioritize hot spots for vaccines so that we can get those jabs in people's arms as quickly as possible and stop this virus. Will you do that? Will you send the required vaccines to those hot zones, yes or no, so that we can save lives—

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

Minister of Health to reply.

Hon. Christine Elliott: The short answer to that is yes, we are prioritizing hot spots. That's how we know we're having this rate of transmission. If we don't prioritize hot spots, then there's going to be more transmission across the entire province.

I would like to make one thing perfectly clear, because the member raised this issue: No triage protocol has been activated in Ontario. What we are doing is making sure that we can create the capacity that we need for people to be able to be treated in hospital. That's why we declared the state of emergency and the stay-at-home order. That's why we've asked for surgeries to be set back, except for emergency surgeries. That's why we're asking for more people to come on board and be redeployed from other areas, and that's why we're asking people to be transferred in situations where, perhaps, they might not agree. But we will make every effort to make sure that they are transferred somewhere close to home, because we know it's difficult for patients and families if that has to happen.

But please be assured—and please, I would like the people of Ontario to be assured—that we are taking every step that we need to take to make sure—

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

That concludes our question period for this morning.

DEFERRED VOTES

SUPPORTING BROADBAND AND INFRASTRUCTURE EXPANSION ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SOUTENANT L'EXPANSION DE L'INTERNET ET DES INFRASTRUCTURES

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

Bill 257, An Act to enact the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021 and to make other amendments in respect of infrastructure and land use planning matters / *Projet de loi 257, Loi édictant la Loi de 2021 sur la réalisation accélérée de projets d'Internet à haut débit et apportant d'autres modifications en ce qui concerne les infrastructures et des questions d'aménagement du territoire.*

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

The division bells rang from 1137 to 1207.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 257, An Act to enact the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021 and to make other amendments in respect of infrastructure and land use planning matters, has been held.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 42; the nays 14.

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

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

Third reading agreed to.

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT (ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS), 2021

LOI DE 2021 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL (ACCÈS DES TRAVAILLEURS ESSENTIELS AUX SOUTIENS EN MATIÈRE DE SANTÉ MENTALE)

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

Bill 267, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 to establish a presumption for certain workers respecting chronic or traumatic mental stress in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic / *Projet de loi 267, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail afin d'établir une présomption de stress mental chronique ou traumatique chez certains travailleurs en lien avec la pandémie de COVID-19.*

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bells will now ring for 15 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. Once again, I'll ask the Clerks to prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1209 to 1224.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 267, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 to establish a presumption for certain workers respecting chronic or traumatic mental stress in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, has taken place.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 15; the nays are 41.

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

Second reading negatived.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business at this time, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1225 to 1300.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. John Fraser: I beg leave to present the first report 2021 from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Fraser presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. John Fraser: I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Fraser has moved the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Ms. Donna Skelly: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Short): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 254, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to elections and members of the Assembly / Projet de loi 254, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les élections et les députés à l'Assemblée.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2021 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 1, 2021, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: Mr. Speaker, it's always a pleasure to rise in the House on behalf of my constituents in Brantford–Brant to talk about the very important work that our government is doing to ensure for Ontarians, and specifically my riding, that their health and well-being are looked after in a responsible manner, especially when dealing with this global pandemic that we are currently facing.

Before I begin speaking about the budget motion debate today, I would like to thank our Minister of Finance, Minister Bethlenfalvy, and his parliamentary assistants, PA Cho and PA Cuzzetto, for their tireless work on the 2021 budget. Also, I would like to thank their staff for all the work they've done, along with ministry staff and ministers across government for all of their contributions. I need to mention and thank many of the countless stakeholders and organizations who have also contributed during consultations. Thank you, all.

Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy builds on this government's record spending in response to the global pandemic, bringing the total investment to \$51 billion over four years. These key investments protect people's health and our economy.

I would like to talk about some of the initiatives in the budget with respect to protecting people's health.

We have made a commitment to vaccinate every person in the province who wants to be vaccinated. Our government has made more than \$1 billion available for a province-wide vaccination strategy. We are also making it safer to re-engage with workplaces, businesses and communities with \$2.3 billion for testing and contact tracing.

This government has made a commitment to protect our front-line heroes and our vulnerable people with an investment of \$1.4 billion for personal protective equipment, including more than 315 million masks and more than 1.2 billion gloves.

We ensure every person who requires care in a hospital can access a bed, even during the worst of the pandemic. We are investing an additional \$5.1 billion to support hospitals since the pandemic began, creating more than 3,100 additional hospital beds, including an investment of \$1.8 billion in 2021-22 to continue providing care for COVID-19 patients in order to deal with surgical backlogs and keep pace with patient needs.

With respect to fixing long-term care, we needed to address decades of neglect and help those waiting to get into long-term care. I am extremely pleased that our government is investing an additional \$933 million over four years, for a total of \$2.6 billion, to support building 30,000 new long-term-care beds in Ontario. This government is also investing \$246 million over the next four years to improve living conditions in existing homes. This includes ensuring that homes have air conditioning for residents so that loved ones can live in comfort, with the safety, dignity and respect they so deserve.

When it comes to protecting loved ones in long-term care from COVID-19, our government is investing an additional \$650 million in 2021-22, bringing the total resources invested since the beginning of the pandemic to protect the most vulnerable to over \$2 billion.

We are ensuring loved ones receive the best-quality care in this country with an investment totalling \$4.9 billion over four years to increase the average direct daily care to four hours a day in long-term care, and hiring more than 27,000 new positions, including personal support workers and nurses.

Our government has an obligation to address the need for more health care services. We are making investments to support historic hospital expansion and construction projects; for example, a new in-patient wing at William Osler Health System's Peel Memorial and ongoing planning of a new regional hospital down in Windsor-Essex. We are also investing in the creation of new children's treatment centres in Ottawa and Chatham-Kent to increase access to critical programs and services.

I would like to provide you with a quote that came to me the day following the budget's release: "I join the Lansdowne family in applauding yesterday's Ontario 2021 budget investment of \$240 million over four years in our sector to address wait-lists for pediatric rehabilitation and child development. Many, many thanks!" That was from Rita-Marie Hadley, executive director of Lansdowne Children's Centre in Brantford. I'd like to thank Rita-Marie and all of the support staff at Lansdowne Children's

Centre for the amazing work they do day in and day out with children who very much benefit from their world-renowned services. Thank you.

Speaker, our government is making investments to help the thousands of people struggling with mental health and addictions issues. We are providing additional funding of \$175 million in 2021-22 as part of the historic investment of \$3.8 billion over 10 years to provide more and better care for everyone who needs it.

To assist survivors of domestic violence, which has increased during COVID-19, and other heinous crimes like human trafficking, we are investing an additional \$2.1 million over three years to support victims of crime. This support is in addition to funding provided through various existing programs in place to help victims of domestic violence and other violent crimes.

I would just like to say to those who work in that sector, also, thank you for everything that you do. I was talking to a director in Brantford the other day and she said that their calls increased by over 400% over the last few months. Thank you for all the trauma that you endure on behalf of our most vulnerable.

To make progress in our collective efforts to address systemic racism, our government is making additional investments in key communities. This includes investments of \$1.6 million over two years to support the Anti-Racism and Anti-Hate Grant Program, which will support community-based anti-racism initiatives, focusing on anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. This builds on a \$60-million investment in the Black Youth Action Plan.

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Now I would like to talk about some of the investments needed to protect our economy. These initiatives total a staggering \$23.3 billion in supports. We are supporting workers and families with their training expenses by proposing a new Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit for 2021. It would provide up to \$2,000 per recipient for 50% of eligible expenses, for a total of \$260 million in support to about 230,000 people in the province of Ontario.

To help families—who have faced new pressures and expenses due to the pandemic—keep more money in their pockets, the government is providing a third round of payments to support parents through the Ontario COVID-19 Child Benefit, totalling \$1.8 billion since last March. This payment will be doubled to \$400 per child for this round and \$500 for each child with special needs, which means a family with three young children, one of whom has special needs, will receive \$2,600 in total after the third round of payments.

Our government is supporting parents with the cost of child care, and to help them get back into the workforce, the government is proposing a 20% enhancement of the CARE tax credit for 2021. This would increase support from \$1,250 to \$1,500 on average, providing about \$75 million in additional support for child care expenses for over 300,000 families.

To help seniors stay in the homes that they love, we have introduced the Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit for

2021. This new credit will provide an estimated \$30 million in support for about 27,000 seniors and people who live with senior relatives.

Speaker, COVID-19 has taken its toll on small businesses. To help small businesses that have been most affected by the necessary restrictions to protect people from COVID-19, our government is providing a much-needed second round of the Ontario Small Business Support Grant payments to eligible recipients. Approximately 120,000 small businesses will automatically benefit from an additional \$1.7 billion in relief through the second round of support in the form of grants of a minimum of \$10,000 and up to \$20,000, bringing the estimated total support provided through this grant to \$3.4 billion.

To support Ontario's tourism, hospitality and culture industries, which have been among the most heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, our government is investing an additional \$400 million over the next three years in new initiatives to support these sectors. This builds on previously announced investments of \$225 million, bringing the total to more than \$625 million in supports since the pandemic began.

To connect homes, businesses and communities to broadband—which COVID-19 has demonstrated is a necessity and not a luxury—we are investing \$2.8 billion, bringing the province's total investment to nearly \$4 billion over six years, beginning in 2019-20.

To better encourage business investment in certain regions of the province that have lagged in employment growth in the past, our government is proposing to temporarily enhance the Regional Opportunities Investment Tax Credit by investing an additional \$61 million, resulting in total tax credit support of about \$155 million by 2022-23.

With respect to much-needed supports for faith-based and cultural organizations that are struggling due to the additional costs caused by COVID-19, we will be making up to \$50 million available for grants to eligible organizations.

To support Ontario's 444 municipalities, the province's key partners in the fight against COVID-19, the government is providing almost \$1 billion in additional financial relief in 2021 to help preserve vital public services and support economic recovery. This builds on the \$4 billion in federal-provincial support provided to communities across the province under the historic Safe Restart program. Our government joins municipalities in our continued calls for the federal government to step up and provide, at a minimum, a matching amount of federal funding to these important new provincial investments.

In order to better support long-term economic growth and sustainable public finances, the government must evolve and become more modern, along with the rest of the world. We are committed to supporting a modernized government that puts citizens at the centre of every action that we take. Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy provides a progress update on our Ontario's COVID-19 Action Plan for a People-Focused Government and the \$500-million Ontario

Onwards Acceleration Fund. These initiatives and supports are unprecedented, with a total investment of \$51 billion in supports over four years.

Now, Speaker, I would like to provide some supportive quotes that we have received with respect to this budget. Here is one from Brant county's mayor, Mayor David Bailey: "The province of Ontario has been a partner to our community throughout this pandemic. I am pleased to see the province's continued focus on protecting the most vulnerable in our community from the ongoing pandemic. As Minister Bethlenfalvy said, you can't have a healthy economy without healthy people. Investing in long-term care, health care, and support for families, workers and communities are key priorities in many communities including Brant and this recognition of need is encouraging. Overall, the investment in local government is welcome."

This quote came from the city of Brantford mayor, Mayor Kevin Davis: "I feel very encouraged by the provincial budget. There are a number of supports for municipalities, particularly related to COVID-19. This assistance will position the city well to sustain and recover from the pandemic."

Here's another from James Rilett, vice-president, Restaurants Canada: "The Ontario Small Business Support Grant has provided much-needed capital to restaurants desperately struggling to survive the pandemic. Doubling the grant will help them cover costs to reopen and bring their employees safely back to work so that our industry can continue to play a key role feeding the recovery."

Here's another one, from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, via CBC Radio One: "From the chamber's perspective, what we see here is a lot of the immediate necessary supports that are going to be required to see businesses—and particularly businesses that have been acutely impacted by this crisis—through to the end of the economic crisis."

And then here's another one: "At a high level, tourism is vital to regional economies across Ontario. The industry has been badly gutted and this is something the chamber has been beating the drum on in terms of needing specific supports for businesses and workers in these sectors. So this new funding—combined with that tourism tax credit announced in the last year's budget—will support organizations that have not been eligible for other supports. And we hope this will help facilitate the industry's revival post-pandemic and when it's safe to travel again." That was from Daniel Safayeni, vice-president of policy, Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

Here's one from the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters: "Manufacturing is the cornerstone of Ontario's economy and today's budget reaffirms the government of Ontario's commitment to take action to help the sector reinvest and grow coming out of the COVID-19 crisis. Specific and immediate measures to encourage investment, support training and reduce operational costs are critical toward achieving this goal and are welcomed by our sector. These actions, along with the continuation of

CME's Ontario Made program, will allow us to work with local manufacturers to increase their sales and grow their businesses. CME also applauds the government of Ontario's commitment to launch an economic growth plan and to work with CME to develop a long-term manufacturing strategy that should be a springboard for Ontario's prosperity and growth for the next generation." That's from Mathew Wilson, senior vice-president, policy and government relations, Ontario, Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters.

Another crucial stakeholder, ROMA, or the Rural Ontario Municipal Association: "The additional provincial investment of \$2.8 billion to enhance broadband responds directly to the priorities of rural Ontario." That is from Robin Jones, chair of the Rural Ontario Municipal Association.

The last quote I'm going to provide, though there are many, many more out there, is from the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers: "OGVG thanks Minister Hardeman, the Premier and the Ontario government for their continued support to agriculture in Ontario that was reflected in today's budget.... Our members appreciate and value the government's commitment to provide whatever support is necessary to secure our domestic food supply chain—today's budget reinforces that commitment. Working together we will get Ontario through the COVID-19 crisis and rebuild a province we will all be proud of." That was from George Gilvesy, chair of the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers.

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Speaker, COVID-19 has been extremely difficult for everyone, and I hear this daily. Just this weekend, I was having a conversation with a friend of mine who owns a small restaurant in St. George. She actually opened during the pandemic. I think she's ineligible for any of the federal government supports because her business has not been open for more than a year. Do you know what she told me this weekend? She said that she had been able to secure a grant from the supporting small businesses grant. That was so exciting for her because she found that out—even since January she has been affected that much more.

These unprecedented times call for unprecedented measures. The people of Ontario, I believe, will rise, as they have always risen, to the challenge. They've done the difficult task to get the job done. This budget that our government is providing is doing exactly that.

I'd like to thank everyone for their attention. I wish everyone a good afternoon.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member for his speech. I know when he talks about his friend who is a small business owner—I hear the same pain from a lot of businesses in my riding of Scarborough Southwest, as well.

We're also hearing from a lot of businesses that this grant is coming to an end. Would the member like to answer as to why it's coming to an end, since the pandemic

just hit the third wave—full front—and would they like to extend the grant?

Mr. Will Bouma: I apologize to the member from Scarborough Southwest; I must not have been clear enough. I don't know if she missed it in all the conversation around the budget, but we are actually doubling the investment for the small business grant in the province of Ontario in a way that not even our federal partners have been able to do. So everyone who has had the opportunity to get the grant in the first place is automatically getting a second round of that through this. That's the good news that we have for those small businesses she's asking about.

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

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member for Brantford–Brant for his comments.

Our government has made unprecedented investments in health care throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and many other things. The Premier has said many times that we will spare no expense to make sure that the health and safety of Ontarians is protected.

I'm wondering if you could just detail some of the spending that we've made with respect to health care in this budget.

Mr. Will Bouma: Mr. Speaker, through you back to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence: I think that's such an excellent question.

Something that has meant so much to me is the funding that we've seen going into the community paramedicine program. That is a huge program. I'd like to say to everyone watching, thanks to Mike Nolan from Renfrew for all the work that he has done on this with our Minister of Long-Term Care. I think what we've realized is that even with the 30,000 beds that we've committed to—it will be very difficult for us to construct all the beds necessary. To be able to have paramedics come into people's homes at a much lower cost than long-term care, to be able to keep them in the places that they love is so key during this—not just during COVID-19, but moving forward. So I would also like to thank our Minister of Long-Term Care for really going to bat for our seniors, and at the Treasury Board, for getting this through. This is something that I'm very excited about. I can tell you that when I was on council and the funding was threatened for the community paramedicine program and that was something we were just going to pay for on our own, the province came through at that point, and we've come through in an even bigger way now.

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

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I want to thank the member for his speech, as well.

Living in Brampton, we know that our medical system is in dire shape right now. With the pandemic, it has only been exacerbated. We have people having to be sent to other hospitals across the GTA because we are overwhelmed, because we are bursting at the seams.

In this budget, there's a mention of an additional wing for Peel Memorial. There is no mention of a third hospital,

which we so desperately need. And this additional wing at Peel Memorial—the shovels won't be in the ground until 2023.

Is there any chance that Brampton will get a third hospital now? We need this hospital because, as I mentioned, we are bursting at the seams. I'd like to know if the member will suggest having this—

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

Mr. Will Bouma: I really appreciate the question from the member from Brampton North. He's absolutely right—and what I've realized in my role, too, because our hospital president says the exact same thing. He has seen a lot of hospitals. Walking through the Brant Community Healthcare System on the tours that I've been able to go on—especially in our mental health departments, which have seen some small investments—I absolutely agree with him that we need to see some of this infrastructure investment.

I'll have everyone note that there was no announcement for a new hospital in Brantford in our budget, either, and we are sorely in need of major investment in health care.

I think what we're dealing with, as a government, is just the fact that those infrastructure investments were never made for a couple of decades and that we need to get caught up on that. So I'm very pleased that you are at least getting a wing built onto your hospital. But we have a lot of catching up to do and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The next question goes to the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I just wanted to follow up, because both of the questions from the member from Eglinton–Lawrence and the member from Brampton North highlight what has really been the problem in the province of Ontario over the last little bit, and that's the fact that for 15 years the Liberals failed to make important investments in health care. They failed to make important investments in long-term care. They failed to make important investments in our post-secondary education. During the pandemic, we've seen the results of that lack of investment, whether it was in the poor testing that we had at the beginning—we've increased that to 75,000—or whether it was ICU capacity, which we're increasing, or critical care capacity, which we're increasing. If the Liberals disagree with me, I invite them, with the next question, to rise and disagree with me on anything that I've just said.

I wonder if the member could comment on the fact that for 15 years the Liberals left this province in such a shambles, which has now caused this Legislature to have to catch up so that we can attack the pandemic head-on.

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate the government House leader for his question, because he's absolutely right. Something I never realized was the absolutely abysmal state that the infrastructure in my riding was left with after 15 years of Liberal government.

We've invested \$5.1 billion to support hospitals since the pandemic began. We've created 3,100 additional hospital beds, and now we're working on staffing all of those hospital beds. We have so much work to do.

I was looking for a \$3-million investment and a thorough community consultation for the hospital in my riding. Obviously, the other investments in Peel take precedence over that, and I understand that because of the situation they're in.

The fact of the matter is, we are way behind. We have a long way to go.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I listened intently to the member opposite's speech and to the things that he talked about.

He talked about the children's treatment centres that are being built—well done. My question regarding that is, what about the base funding that those treatment centres need to be able to thrive and strive and ensure that they're serving our most vulnerable children? The autism funding that hasn't flowed to families—where was that in the budget?

He talked about mental health and addictions—yet a detox centre is sitting at 50% capacity, and they have no base funding. People are struggling on the streets. People are dying. Opioid overdoses have increased by 50%.

People on OW and ODSP weren't even mentioned in the budget.

What does he have to say to the many people who were left out of this very important and needed budget?

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Mr. Will Bouma: I can't find it right now in my notes, but I wanted to pull up again the supportive quote from Rita-Marie Hadley from the Lansdowne Children's Centre in Brantford. We also desperately need a new children's treatment centre. It's interesting; our treatment centre is a schedule K hospital, which is a unique place, so it gets funding from all sorts of different ministries. I'll take this opportunity just to say "hats off" to the staff at the Lansdowne treatment centre for the incredible work that they do not just in my community but for the entire region—and the fact that, again, a dramatic lack of infrastructure spending by previous governments, so we're left behind the eight ball on this now. We have an incredible partnership with the city of Brantford, with Lansdowne Children's Centre, and I'm really looking forward to the city coming up with the land necessary so that we can get that work done and get going on that, because we have a bold vision for the future of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Government members, if you have a quick question, you might get a quick response.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I just wanted to follow up on that again—and again, I invite the Liberals to refute me if I'm wrong.

I wonder if the member could, as a volunteer firefighter in his community, comment on the mental health supports

that have been brought in place for front-line workers and first responders.

Mr. Will Bouma: The government House leader has an incredible way of hitting close to home. Just the other night, we were out with the fire trucks at a suicide call. They were loading the patient into the ambulance by the time that we got there.

The fact of the matter is, there, again, we have an area that has seen an abysmal lack of funding by previous governments. The \$3.8 billion that we're seeing—just talk to our Associate Minister of Mental Health. He has been doing such incredible work and he has such a deep understanding of that. To make those supports available for the people who need them most is so important.

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

Mr. Kevin Yarde: It's an honour to rise on behalf of the great folks of Brampton North to speak to this budget.

This government had an opportunity with the budget to provide the people of Ontario hope—hope that there is light at the end of the tunnel, that we won't see more lockdowns, more cuts and more neglect from this government. However, after going over the budget and seeing how much was missing, I could say that this budget took that hope away from people.

The pandemic is not over yet, but this government still hasn't implemented many, many opportunities. We need tools in Ontario to help Ontarians get through this pandemic. The government had chances in this budget to help the people of Ontario by adding things like paid sick days, which I'll talk about, and adequate support for Brampton's health care system, small business supports, and relief on sky-high auto insurance.

As a critic for auto insurance, I was surprised to see not one single mention in this budget on auto insurance. In Ontario, we pay some of the highest auto insurance rates in the country. Ontarians are struggling with the pandemic, and at the same time they are being price-gouged by auto insurance companies. This issue is even worse in Brampton, in my riding of Brampton North as well, where we pay an average of north of \$3,300 annually for auto insurance premiums. Despite having the highest rates in the province, I'm still hearing of premiums being raised from constituents who have had their car parked in their driveway for months.

We proposed a 50% break on auto insurance costs for all drivers and called for a deferral of insurance payments for anyone who lost their job or income. This would provide some much-needed assistance during the pandemic for Ontarians struggling to get by, and help make their lives more affordable.

My question to the government is, why has this government included nothing in their budget to provide Ontarians some relief on auto insurance premiums? Hopefully, we'll get an answer from them today.

All this government has done is pass regulations that allow auto insurance companies to provide rebates, but there was no specific rebate amount being regulated. That allowed some companies to give a much smaller break,

giving back only a few dollars to drivers. Instead, many companies have been increasing their premiums, while statistics show less drivers and less accidents on the road during the pandemic. This has resulted in auto insurance companies hitting record-high profits from the reduced costs, but Ontario drivers still had their premiums raised. This government needs to mandate lower auto insurance rates to ensure that these savings that the auto insurance companies are seeing get passed down to drivers.

In Brampton North and in Brampton East—my colleague is here, as well—I've had calls to my constituency office and emails, and people have said that they got a break from their insurance company. So I asked them, how much did they get? Monthly, maybe \$5, \$6 in terms of a rebate. We all know that is not right and that is not enough. This is what happens when the government leaves it up to the auto insurance companies to decide how they're going to assist Ontarians. There is no will to assist Ontarians.

What the government needs to do is to legislate assistance for Ontarians.

The Liberal government made promises, as well. When they were in power for 15 years, they did not assist Ontario drivers in terms of auto insurance. Near the end of their mandate, they just decided as a political ploy, "We're going to lower the insurance by 15%." That never happened. That never panned out.

So we can't trust the Conservatives or the Liberals to do anything when it comes to auto insurance and assisting Ontarians—because it's all talk. That's all that Ontarians have seen, and that's all we're going to get.

We spoke briefly about child care. In Brampton, it's particularly precarious and very expensive. It is expensive right across Ontario. Brampton had one of the highest declines—50% in child care enrolment between February 2020 and September 2020—and the largest percentage fee increases in median preschool-aged fees: 21% from 2019 to 2020. We have some of the highest child care fees in the country.

This budget included no support for the child care sector or any investment to control fees for parents—just a slight one-time increase to the CARE tax credit. This is not funding to stabilize a sector that was devastated by COVID-19.

My colleague from Hamilton Mountain, who has been a champion for autism and the autism file, asked a question that I'm going to ask again. There was not one mention in the budget for funding for autism. This is a shame. This is very, very shameful. Hopefully, today, we'll get an answer as to why there was no funding for autism. Instead, the budget includes an entire section that encourages the federal government to include things in their national child care strategy, relying on other governments to implement—not them; other governments.

We need this government to address the child care issues in Brampton and across Ontario, not point fingers, because, as we all know, that will not get us anywhere.

We also talked about ODSP. In terms of funding, it was also not mentioned in the budget. I will most likely come back to speaking about these two things again.

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In terms of business, we have a lot of small businesses in Brampton, many mom-and-pop shops—and all of Ontario and all Ontario businesses are hurting, struggling to survive throughout this pandemic and throughout these lockdowns. We've had some of the longest lockdowns due to the mishandling of this government that made things worse for small business owners, yet there were no extended tax deferral periods for businesses that were significantly impacted by the second shutdown—for small business tax forgiveness.

Mr. Speaker, I was also shocked to not see any expanded eligibility for the Ontario Small Business Support Grant—the grant that would have helped many of the small business owners who reached out to me. They're wondering when their business will reopen. This government needs to help those small business owners who are struggling to get by but who do not qualify for the OSBSG.

I've had calls to my office from many small business owners saying that they don't think they're going to make it through April. Here we are now, in April, and this government needs to step up to assist these small businesses.

The government touts themselves as being for the people, for businesses, but small businesses have seen since this pandemic and prior to the pandemic that the government is not on their side. Who's on their side? We are on their side. Unfortunately, this budget does nothing to assist the small businesses.

I want to talk a little bit about the hospital situation in Brampton. We've heard time and time again that Brampton is one of the fastest-growing cities in the country, and yet we have only one hospital with an emergency room. Brampton has been facing a health care crisis since before the pandemic. The city of Brampton declared a health care emergency in January 2020—the mayor and the councillors. When the pandemic hit, things went from bad to worse. Despite this, the only mention of funding for Brampton's health care crisis was a \$1.5-million planning grant and up to \$18 million to expand Peel Memorial's urgent care centre to 24/7 operations. In other words, this government promised a new in-patient wing at Peel Memorial, but construction doesn't start—not this year, in 2021, not in 2022, but some time in 2023.

The extension to Peel Memorial promised by the Premier is not sufficient nor is it a new hospital. It does not assist the people of Brampton. Bramptonians know this all too well. This is just another election promise like the previous Liberal and Conservative governments made to Brampton. We don't need any more election promises. What we need is action, and we need action now. That starts with immediate funding for Peel Memorial to be converted into a full hospital, including an emergency room, and building another stand-alone hospital, a third hospital, so that Bramptonians don't have to rely on hallway medicine. Our health care crisis will not be over until Brampton has at least three 24/7 hospitals with emergency rooms.

The member from Brantford mentioned that he doesn't have an additional hospital. However, some of the other

cities in Ontario with much lower populations than Brampton have three, four, five fully functioning hospitals. So why is Brampton left behind again, with no mention of a third hospital in this budget? For one of the fastest-growing cities, with more than 600,000 people, it is unacceptable that we only have one hospital with an emergency room. Brampton deserves its fair share, and that starts with more investments into our health care system, not empty election promises, like we've had from the previous Liberal and Conservative governments.

As we all know, Brampton Civic, which is in my riding—the day after it opened, it was already over capacity. That's how bad it has been. During this pandemic and even before, people have had to go to Milton hospital and to other hospitals in the GTA for assistance. It shouldn't have to be like that. They shouldn't have to be transferred to other hospitals. The doctors and the nurses at Brampton Civic are doing the best they can with what they have. We have no qualms with the doctors or the nurses.

What we do have a qualm with is the government and the previous governments that let Brampton down and left hallway medicine in our hospitals. We were underfunded by the Liberal government, and now we are underfunded by this Conservative government.

The addition to Peel Memorial is not an additional hospital. We saw the members opposite going on TV and radio and in print, talking about, "Hey, Brampton is getting a new hospital." We are not getting a new hospital, plain and simple. When you add an addition to your house, is it a new house? No. It's the same house. We are in dire straits in Brampton. It is not a new hospital. A new hospital—shovels in the ground, and you build a new hospital.

Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the education system. Brampton is one of the youngest cities in Ontario, with a median age of around 33 years. Despite this, the city does not have a single full university. The Premier promised us a medical school, but Brampton deserves more. Our youth are forced to travel to other cities for post-secondary education. They have to travel to York University. They have to travel to U of T. They have to travel to Hamilton. We've been pushing for a full university for a long time in Brampton. I believe we can do better than just a medical school for our city and for our youth.

The House leader on the opposite side—in his riding, in Markham, they're getting a new university.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Not my riding.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Whatever riding you're in—in Markham. In the Markham-Unionville area, they're getting a new university. So why can't Brampton be the same?

It's time for our youth to not have to travel far distances. They should have a full-fledged university. A medical university is a start; I'll give them that. But what we need is a university that has the arts, the sciences—a full-fledged university.

Mr. Speaker, on March 16, I had the pleasure of speaking with Dr. Lawrence Loh, Peel's medical officer

of health, when he joined me as a guest in my virtual town hall that I hosted with my constituents. He helped answer many questions that my constituents had been asking regarding the pandemic, and a majority of these questions were on vaccines and the vaccine rollout.

The vaccine rollout, as we all know—and I'm sure many members on the opposite side agree with me—has been slow and sloppy. This government has to and can do better. While local public health units are picking up the slack, they shouldn't have to do that. Our local health care system is already strained. And in Brampton, as I mentioned before, we are seeing health care in crisis. We need to be helping our local public health units, not leaving them to pick up after the government.

Speaking of vaccines, my office had a conversation with one of my constituents—I want to read this; her name is Donna—who reached out to our office because she was really upset with the government. She had been trying to figure out how to get her 90-year-old mother the COVID-19 vaccine shot immediately. Donna's mother needed the shot to be able to see her terminally ill sister. She was eventually able to get her mother vaccinated, but the process shouldn't have been this difficult for her in a time of need.

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She was rightfully frustrated and angered that there was nothing in place to help for emergency cases such as hers. She raised a lot of concerns with the Conservative government mishandling the vaccine rollout and, in her words, "Doug Ford wasting millions on bracelets and other useless things to line up the pockets of his friends."

Mr. Speaker, Donna is a teacher, and she mentioned that instead of wasting money on useless things such as bracelets, we could have used that money on our education system, which has been seeing cuts for years under this government. I couldn't agree more—especially as we saw the funding cuts for education in the provincial budget. I learned a few days ago that Peel will be laying off over 60 teachers due to these cuts. This is a time when our teachers and students need the government's support, but instead they have been given cuts.

The schools of Ontario, and especially in Peel region, need more funding to fix the overcrowded class sizes and the poor ventilation. These will lead to the spread of COVID-19 in our schools. We've already seen that. We need to invest in our education system, especially in the midst of a pandemic, to ensure they have the funding necessary to operate safely. Instead, this government has made the problem worse. Their cuts led to layoffs, which will inevitably increase class sizes and drive up school repair backlog.

While I'm speaking on education, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Judging by the comments on the other side during your presentation, I'm sure we're in for some rousing questions.

The first question, the member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite for his comments.

I listened to your comments and your speech on this item, and I noticed that you certainly said that there are a lot of things you'd like to have. You'd like to have a university, you'd like to have more money for autism—even though we doubled the funding last year—and you'd like to have yet another hospital in Brampton.

I'm just wondering why, then, are you harping on paid sick leave when we already have paid sick leave; \$700,000, as I understand it, is still there ready to be claimed. Would you rather that we spend money on some of the other things that you think are important priorities, or duplicate, for some reason, existing funding which the federal government has made available through the paid sick leave program for workers?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Thank you for your question.

As we know, paid sick leave is in dire straits in Ontario. Many people don't qualify for it. In my riding of Brampton North, we have manufacturing, essential workers, people who need paid sick leave, and they're having to go to work sick because they're not getting paid sick leave.

If we are serious about solving and dealing with the pandemic, paid sick leave needs to be initiated. It's not just me saying it; it's the mayors, the councillors, the medical advisers, the nurses, and even the businesses that are saying paid sick leave is needed.

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

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I would like to thank the member from Brampton North for his eloquent presentation and strong local voice for Brampton North and Brampton.

He talked about the lack of support for this budget. He talked about health care, small businesses.

He also talked about something I share with Brampton, and that is the auto insurance premiums—the issue of the postal code discrimination that affects many GTA drivers. We know that the incidence of accidents is down 50%, but this budget doesn't include any relief for drivers.

You talked a bit about it. Could you explain the need for—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pose your question, please.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Drivers do not have relief. Why not, since they're parking their cars in garages?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I thank the member from York South–Weston for the question.

Mr. Speaker, it really is a shame that during a pandemic we're still paying some of the highest auto insurance rates, and not only that, insurance rates continue to go up. If ever there's a time for auto insurance rates to go down, it is now. Obviously, this government does not care about auto insurance in terms of drivers, lowering auto insurance rates—and it's very easy for them to do that.

As the member mentioned, vehicles are sitting in the driveway, there are fewer accidents, there are fewer cars on the roads, yet we continue to see rates increase again and again. Insurance companies are not giving the breaks they should be giving. Instead, they are bringing in billions of dollars in revenue. They should be using that revenue

to assist the people of Ontario, and we're not seeing that happen.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I listened intently when he talked about paid sick leave and the need for it.

Premier Ford led the charge with the provinces to get agreement with the Prime Minister to look after sick leave, and \$1.2 billion has been set aside. More importantly, \$500 million to \$600 million of that comes from the taxpayers of Ontario, who have funded this sick leave. I know there are some issues with it.

My question to the member opposite: Have you contacted your MP? Have you talked about the shortcomings? It is a federal responsibility. They've taken this on. If you don't provide the feedback, you can't expect them to improve. It's easy just to complain to anybody else that you're not happy with the sick leave,

If you actually looked at the—

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: —and the Prime Minister's office has actually put a plan together that's definitely not perfect—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you very much. We'll go to the member from Brampton North to respond.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I agree with the member; it is a shortcoming and it isn't helping Ontarians, which is why we're asking you to help Ontarians—

Mr. Jim McDonell: Have you said anything?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: —and it's not happening. You're in power.

We need paid sick leave. Like I said, it's not just me saying it; it's the experts, it's the medical community, it's the doctors, it's the nurses, it's all the mayors, it's all the councillors. This is something we need to bring in now. If we are serious about ending this pandemic and dealing with this pandemic and stopping people from going to work sick, we have to provide sick leave. It's quite simple. The government keeps saying it's there, but it is not enough, and we all know that. For some reason, the government seems to think it's enough.

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: This issue of paid sick leave is something that I want to ask the member for Brampton North to elaborate on further.

Whenever they get asked about paid sick leave, the Conservative government clearly gets defensive, and they just want to blame the federal government.

You have to understand that it's not the NDP alone; it is mayors of major cities, public health officials—people across the board have all come together and said really clearly that you need paid sick days to help people in Ontario.

We continually see the Conservative government choosing not to help Ontarians. This is problematic, and it's ultimately holding back Ontarians and threatening

lives. Lives are at risk when we don't bring in paid sick days.

My question to the member is, can you elaborate and really clarify to the Conservative government—it's mind-boggling to have to say this—that they have an obligation to workers in Ontario and it's their responsibility to ensure that workers are protected and they should help them out?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I thank the member for Brampton East for his words.

Of course, we're not asking the government to duplicate what the federal government is doing. What we're asking them to do is to assist by adding more input and putting in more dollars to help people get through this pandemic—because the way it's set up right now, it's not working.

Once we get paid sick days from this government—I'm not going to hold my breath—it will help people to stay home instead of having them go to work sick.

1400

We've seen time and time again—especially what's been happening in Brampton. We've seen, at Canada Post, at large facilities in Brampton, people having to go to work because they can't choose between paying their bills and going to work. They have to go to work because they don't have adequate paid sick days.

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

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite.

I just have to follow up on this question. I'm trying to understand what the issue is. You've said that we do have a paid sick leave program at the federal level, which is available to workers across Ontario and across Canada, and there's still money in it. I don't think workers care which level of government pays for it, seeing as how every level of government only gets money from people paying taxes—so that's all of them. If the program is there—it pays out sick leave within three days, and you don't have to actually wait for the paycheque to come. I just want to ask the member why that isn't a sufficient paid sick leave program. If there's a problem with it, why don't you take that up with the federal government so that they can improve it? We're certainly trying to work with them to improve it at all times. Can you answer that?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: It's obvious that it's not working. I'm not sure why the member has to ask that question, because everybody knows it's not working. People are going to work sick because don't have adequate paid sick days—simple as that. Why the government is so fixated on not helping the people of Ontario is beyond me.

Many people in Brampton still have to go to work—and I can't fault them for having to go to work sick, because there are no paid sick days that are adequate enough for them to stay home, to pay their bills, to pay their high auto insurance rates.

It is not enough money that the federal government has provided. This government needs to step up and provide the assistance for the people of Brampton and the people of Ontario.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I am honoured to rise to speak to the budget motion, on behalf of the people of Scarborough–Guildwood.

Today we are seeing record numbers of COVID-19 cases in the province; in fact, a record number of days in a row of COVID-19 cases. I remember when Dr. Williams would say that under 1,000 positivity was what we needed to see. Well, we are in the mid-4,000s.

As these cases continue to rise due to the variants of concern, Ontario is in the throes of a devastating third wave of COVID-19, since the pandemic began over a year ago, with the variants of concern having really concerning effects on younger Ontarians. Our province is in a stay-at-home emergency order, and it remains in lockdown.

Many people in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood are concerned. They are feeling the devastating effects of the pandemic.

I want to note that all of the pop-up clinics have had to stop working today because they don't have enough vaccine supplied to them by this government to meet the needs of the people in hot spots.

I was very concerned to hear my colleague the member from Ottawa South this morning, in his question to the Minister of Health—why the government is giving non-hot spots vaccines as if they were hot spots. That affects communities like Scarborough, where we have high positivity rates and high hospitalization rates. Our ICUs have been diverting patients since the end of 2020.

I actually asked the health minister about investments in Scarborough's hospitals and why we weren't seeing more investments, and I was very disappointed to see that that was not addressed in this budget, because we know that there is a need to renew the infrastructure in Scarborough. There's a need to make sure that the people can fulfill the vision that they have for a new hospital, which, as the minister has said, has been on the books for quite some time. This was an opportunity to do that and to invest in the people of Scarborough, and this government has not done that.

The concern around the distribution of vaccines is one that does require a courageous government. It does require the government looking at the data and seeing where the supply is needed the most. We can't continue to vaccinate away in green zones, where people are not necessarily experiencing the same health threats as those in those hot spots—because the essential workers have to continue to go to work. They have to continue to face that virus each and every day.

I've asked the government about paid sick leave. Of course, everyone in the opposition has done that, but I'm also now asking the government for paid vaccination leave. We've seen in other jurisdictions where this has worked to help those essential workers to get the vaccine. There has been no response. What about providing strong PPE, KN95 PPE that we make right here in Ontario so that those essential workers can face the risk but with more protection? What about making sure that they have frequent and rapid testing?

Speaker, these are just the basics. This is a budget. We should be going beyond the basics. The basics should already be covered, and we should be doing more, but the government has missed the opportunity to do more.

Long-term care: Despite the ravages of COVID-19 on the elderly in long-term care, in this budget the government does not fulfill the known issue of four hours of average care for residents in long-term care, instead kicking the ball down the field.

This is also an opportunity to invest in education. Representatives from OSSTF came to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to talk about the concerns for the lack of investment in public education. I asked Harvey Bischof about the learning gaps, because this is something that I hear about in my riding all the time—that there is a growing learning gap for students and for young people as a result of the chaos they've experienced during the last year. But there's no planning from this government, there's no investment from this government to prepare those students for a full and solid return to school, when they will have to catch up. Instead, the government wants to double down on its plan, which was, before the pandemic, to have online learning for students. That is not the question. The question is, how do we make sure that Ontario's students are set up for the future? What are the investments that we need today? How do we prepare? We have an excellent education system. I know that, having been the former minister, but we have to continue to invest in it, not tear it down.

What about the green recovery? There is no mention, there's silence, there's crickets when it comes to a green economic recovery. This is a missed opportunity, once again, from this government that does not see the planet as something that we have to protect, that we have to make proactive decisions to safeguard. It's a missed opportunity, for sure.

There are many other aspects to this budget.

Women's economic recovery and the she-covery is something that I've certainly talked about repeatedly in this House, having questioned the finance minister and the former finance minister about what we are doing to invest in women's economic recovery. We are at risk of seeing a K recovery, where some individuals will get ahead in the recovery and others will lag behind. It is the job of government to ensure that that does not happen and to make sure that individuals who have been hardest hit get the supports they need. So women—those who had the most in terms of job losses, those who were in sectors that were the hardest hit—need an opportunity to see supports from this government. What's disappointing is that many women are choosing to not participate at all in the labour market. They're just deciding that there are too many other priorities in their lives other than work and it's not worth it to them. This is something that we should all be concerned about. We want women's labour market participation to make sure that it at least meets pre-pandemic levels. What is the government doing to address this major risk that we have?

I also wanted to point out there are many aspects to this where people feel abandoned by their government.

1410

People on disability, on ODSP—there's no mention of the supports that are in place. In fact, in the government's own vaccine rollout, people on disability aren't even part of phase 1 of the plan. They are left behind. They and their representatives call my office trying to get assistance. I asked the minister about people with disabilities, people who are homebound, and there really isn't a plan yet. I know public health is working, scrambling to get a plan in place, but this should not be an afterthought. The first thing that we should do is to think about those who are most vulnerable, most affected and look at society through that lens, as judge Rosalie Abella advised us to do.

Mr. Speaker, I don't have a lot of time. I could talk more about child care. We have leaders like Chrystia Freeland, Canada's Deputy Prime Minister, and Janet Yellen, the US Secretary of the Treasury, who have tied child care to the economy, recognizing that this is something we must have in place to ensure a strong and vibrant and inclusive economy for all.

What about youth? Where is the mention of the youth of this province? In the FAO's report, in the third-quarter finances, we saw that spending in financial aid grants was underspent by \$384 million. This is at a time when we're in a pandemic, at a time when youth unemployment is soaring at 22%. Why are we not investing in young people, in entrepreneurial programs so that they can get back into the labour market for the summer to get ready for the fall, as well as grants for their post-secondary education? This is a huge missed opportunity, and I don't know why the government is not acting.

Speaker, we've talked a lot about health care and about paid sick leave and the need for that. Once again, when we look at the spending that the government has put forward, it does not keep up with the need for programs and services in the province. There's a gap that remains, and if there is a gap in terms of the projections, what that spells is that there will be cuts. There will be cuts to programs in health care and in education that people rely on, and this is a major risk to our province.

Finally, I want to talk about an area that is really important, and that's small business. On March 30, I called on the government to extend the Ontario Small Business Support Grant in recognition of the CFIB's concern that not enough categories of businesses were able to apply and that there was not enough time for them to respond to the second tranche that the government was providing. This was unfair. The government provided a one-week extension. That is not enough. That's actually a bit insulting when you think that we're in a global pandemic.

I'm calling on the government today to extend the access for small businesses across this province to be able to apply for the small business grant so that we do not see the loss of our main streets and the vibrancy and the contributions of those small businesses. Yes, I recognize that you've extended it to the tourism sector. That was needed, but more needs to be done.

Finally, housing: Sadly, there is not enough attention being paid by this government to affordable housing.

OREA presented at the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and said we have a housing affordability crisis across this province. The government needs to do more to invest in preventing homelessness, in preventing people from losing access to their housing, and in matching actions that the federal and the municipal governments are taking to build more affordable housing.

Mr. Speaker, I wish I had more time to talk more about how this budget affects the people of Scarborough and the people of this province, but I'm very happy to take questions from the members.

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

We do have time for questions. The first one goes to the member for Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: Do you know what I find is insulting? The member opposite had an opportunity, as a member of the government under the Liberals for five years, to go ahead and make substantive changes to the province of Ontario. Over the pandemic, we have seen time and time again the inadequacies that were created from a system that they were in charge of for 15 years. For 15 years, they had an opportunity.

In this budget alone, the province is investing \$16.3 billion just into health care. That's going to create new hospitals. It's going to add on to existing hospitals. It's going to create more spaces in long-term care. These are all things that that government had an opportunity to do.

So I want to know: Is this member going to stand up and support what we're trying to do here to fix the mistakes that they made?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member from the government side.

There's a lot that I could say in terms of what the previous Liberal government was doing to clean up things like education, which was left a complete mess after the government of Premier Mike Harris, and the investments that we made in areas like health care.

Public health care, for instance, was something that your government wanted to cut by over \$1 billion. I'm actually calling on you to reinstate the funding that you've cut to public health. Had you not disrupted the public health units, they would have been better prepared to respond to the pandemic. You're now downloading that responsibility, first for testing and now for vaccinations, because you're not prepared as a government to do the work.

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: The Conservative budget clearly fails Brampton, but the health care crisis in Brampton was created because of the neglect of Conservative and Liberal governments.

The Liberal government was in power for 15 years, and under the Liberal government we had hallway medicine, the Liberal government only built one hospital in Brampton for over 600,000 people, and the Liberal government chronically underfunded Brampton Civic.

Will the member admit today that the Liberal government failed Brampton and created a health care crisis that went from bad to worse under the current Conservative government?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you to the member for really being that voice for Brampton.

My parents live in Brampton, my brother and my sister-in-law—in fact, they had my nephew Jordan just four months ago. We want to make sure that Brampton has the health care that it needs and that it deserves.

I agree with the members from Brampton who were wondering, “Where is the new hospital?” We're getting a wing extended to an existing hospital, and the government was trying to pass it off as if it was new, and absolutely you have to call them on that.

As the former Minister of Advanced Education, I was very delighted to go to Brampton to announce the creation of a university, a campus, with Sheridan and Ryerson University. Sadly, this government cancelled that project.

I was pleased to see in this budget that you're now allowing the building of—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The next question goes to the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I just wanted to ask a very specific question of the member opposite, because she raised a point in her speech—she said it would take a courageous government to make certain decisions on vaccines. I want to ask her very specifically: Is it the position of the Liberal Party, her leader, Steven Del Duca, and herself that places in green—for instance, North Bay, Prince Edward-Hastings—should receive no vaccines, that they should all be diverted to Scarborough or other hot spots, until the people in, let's say, Toronto are vaccinated?

Is that the position of the Liberal Party, of your leader and yourself?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: To answer the government House leader—no, that is not the position, and that's not my question to your government and to your Minister of Health.

Places that are hot spots, like Scarborough, need more vaccine supply than other locations where the COVID-19 virus is not spreading. That is my recommendation to the government—that you actually divert those vaccines to the hot spots so we can get the virus under control and there is safety for all people in this province, which is what we are striving to do collectively, working together. Remember that?

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

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I would like to thank the member from Scarborough–Guildwood.

The member talked about what this budget doesn't have—it doesn't have support for small businesses; it doesn't have it for child care; it doesn't have it for paid sick days. But I know that the member had 15 years to actually get it right. It was just in the last year, when that government's term was about to end, that they put in paid sick days, but that also now has been taken away, and now we went from bad to worse.

1420

I agree with the member from Scarborough–Guildwood with regard to hot spots, and I think it’s important to have equities in disparities.

I know that you had the opportunity for 15 years to do it right.

What are you suggesting now to this government to provide hot spot areas such as Scarborough and my area—

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you to the member from York South–Weston.

I certainly saw the story on you in the Star—calling people in Toronto Community Housing and making sure that they get vaccines. It’s something that, in fact, I am doing in my own community, to make sure people in hot spots get the vaccine—even if it’s bringing it door to door.

I was at Taibu Community Health Centre, as well, for Indigenous and Black populations, which are in fact needing priority in this government for vaccinations. When we look at the infection rate, 80% of the people infected with COVID-19 are racialized, diverse people. Therefore, we need to make sure that the life-saving vaccine is getting as quickly into the arms of the people most at risk as soon as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Back to the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, Speaker, I’m not passing judgment on what she said, or even passing comment on her approach. In her answer to me, she said vaccines should be diverted. In her speech, she said a courageous government would make the decision to take from the green and divert to other areas. So I just need to drill down on this.

Is it the position of the Liberal Party, of this member and of her leader, that in areas that were previously green, such as North Bay or Prince Edward–Hastings and other areas, they should have their vaccines that were equitably transferred to them, of the limited supply that we have, diverted and sent to other areas of the province? I’m not trying to catch the member; I just want to know if that is the position and the suggestion of her and her leader and her party.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, I’ve been clear, and I’m not sure why the government House leader doesn’t understand that what I suggested in my question to the government is—why are we equally distributing vaccines to all public health units when we have hot spots that require more vaccines because they are more at risk? We need to have an equitable distribution of the vaccine and provide more supply to hot spot communities like Scarborough, Brampton and other areas where there is a higher infection rate, a higher hospitalization rate, a higher death rate, which costs all of us. We’re not going to get out of lockdown in this province without making sure that everybody everywhere is safe.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): There’s time for a very quick question and a very quick answer.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I have a very quick question to the member from Scarborough–Guildwood.

Of course, in Brampton we still have hallway medicine. And under your government’s leadership for 15 years, we did not get the additional hospital; we continued to see patients having to go to other hospitals.

Now that you’re in opposition, do you not agree with us that we need a third hospital?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member from Brampton for standing up for better health care.

I want you to know that it was under the former Liberal government that we actually started to measure wait times in Ontario’s hospitals. The reason we started to measure those wait times in the former Liberal government was to make improvements to health care in places like Brampton and in Scarborough, where we’re still waiting for—

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

ROYAL ASSENT SANCTION ROYALE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to a certain bill in her office.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Short): The following is the title of the bill to which Her Honour did assent:

An Act to enact the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021 and to make other amendments in respect of infrastructure and land use planning matters / Loi édictant la Loi de 2021 sur la réalisation accélérée de projets d’Internet à haut débit et apportant d’autres modifications en ce qui concerne les infrastructures et des questions d’aménagement du territoire.

2021 ONTARIO BUDGET

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Back to our business. Further debate?

Mr. Mike Harris: I’m honoured to rise here today, on behalf of my constituents from Kitchener–Conestoga, to support this motion that’s before us today.

Just last week, our Premier, relying on the best advice of medical experts, made the difficult decision to declare a third state of emergency and issue a stay-at-home order for the province of Ontario. The word “unprecedented” has been thrown around a lot in this chamber. I’m even recorded in Hansard using it a number of times. It has been generations since a government has had to guide Ontario through a pandemic. There is obviously no guidebook here, no instructions for introducing a budget during these times, but under the leadership of our Premier, we’ve learned that the most important thing we can do is to listen to the people of this province. We’ve heard about the unique challenges they are facing, and of course, we’re listening and following expert advice.

To develop the 2021 budget, the Minister of Finance consulted far and wide and heard from delegation after delegation. Yet even while the minister and his parliamentary assistants participated in hours of Zoom calls and virtual meetings, the members opposite are still trying to say that he did not do enough consultation.

I think it was the member from Waterloo, back in February, who said that the government was not doing enough consultation. Instead, while she was holding press conferences, there were three pre-budget consultations going on in Waterloo region, with nearly 100 delegates, that lasted a total of seven hours. I can say for certain, based on what was included in the budget, that the minister was listening to the people of Waterloo region.

Let me start with the number one priority that was mentioned in all of the delegations. Well over half of the delegates were talking about the GO train. Waterloo region has been waiting patiently for improved GO train service along the Toronto-Kitchener innovation corridor. The Liberals paid lip service to this for years while making minimal improvements, but in just two short years, our government has already doubled the number of trains coming and going from Kitchener. A mid-morning train from Union to the region is now running. We've added more options into the evening for commuters, including both a late-night train and a second express train.

Delivering actual progress towards two-way, all-day GO has been one of my top priorities. If the Minister of Transportation or the Associate Minister of Transportation are listening right now, I'm sure they would agree that I am consistently beating their door down about it. That was the number one ask from the business community, commuters, educational institutions and our local mayors.

On page 104 of the budget, it reads, "Improving and expanding service on the Kitchener GO line." That line, along with the words "two-way, all-day service," provide assurance to my local colleagues that the provincial government of the day is not just trying to talk the talk to get them on side. This is a real commitment in writing to invest in the infrastructure it will take to get those trains moving down the tracks. I'm looking forward to delivering more updates on how our government is moving forward on this top transit priority in the very near future.

I also want to take a second and get on the record how grateful Waterloo region is for this commitment. Regional Chair Karen Redman said, "By continuing to advance two-way, all-day GO service along the Kitchener line, the Ontario government is demonstrating its confidence in Waterloo Region as one of our province's key economic engines. This is a transformative project. Keeping us well connected ensures that the economic benefits accrued to this region can be shared with the rest of the province."

The president of the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce, Ian McLean, called this the most significant investment to date in two-way, all-day GO. Further to my earlier point, he continued by saying that they've heard promises before but are now actually seeing things starting to be delivered.

I have heard great things from local mayors, including the mayor of Waterloo, Dave Jaworsky, who called this a huge step forward.

I couldn't be happier to finally deliver something real and substantial to my local colleagues, who have been championing this project for many, many years. I want to commend them for their advocacy and support. Just as we have for the last two years, I look forward to working with them until there are more trains running on the tracks in both directions.

1430

Another top priority during those consultations, Mr. Speaker, was rural broadband, which I know is something that's also very important to you. Even though Wellesley, Wilmot, Woolwich and North Dumfries all sit on the edge of cities in a region with 630,000 people, they still lack connectivity to fast, reliable, high-speed Internet.

We just had a third reading vote on our Minister of Infrastructure's bill, which includes the Building Broadband Faster Act. It was great to see that important bill pass third reading today, although it was disappointing that not all members of the Legislature think that getting underserved communities online is a priority.

When I spoke in support of that bill, I talked at length about the lack of broadband connectivity in my riding and how it was a barrier for many of my constituents.

I will tell you a quick aside about a virtual announcement I did with the local township mayors. Last June, we joined over Zoom to announce the launch of a request for proposals for broadband infrastructure in Waterloo region through the SWIFT program, which is the Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology program. During this announcement about broadband expansion, one of our rural mayors had her Internet go down and had to drive from her home to the office to partake in the announcement. While it is somewhat fitting for that to happen during this announcement, it is reflective of the day-to-day reality of many families across parts of Waterloo region.

The Minister of Infrastructure has made a firm commitment to getting 700,000 underserved households in our province online. This is supported by the additional \$2.8 billion our government is allocating to broadband expansion over the next six years. The historic investment brings our government's total commitment to nearly \$4 billion—\$4 billion just from the province alone, and we hope that the federal government will kick some more money into the program that they have been talking about for many years but still hasn't come to fruition.

Several business owners who have been impacted by public health measures also participated during these consultations, and one thing was clear: These small business owners understand the importance of doing everything they can to fight COVID-19, but at the same time, they are struggling. I heard a tremendous amount of appreciation for the available support programs, particularly the Ontario Small Business Support Grant. The difference that \$10,000, or up to \$20,000, can make for small business owners is astronomical in many circumstances.

But as we can clearly see, the fight against COVID-19 isn't over yet. These business owners and our local

chambers of commerce made it clear that further support was necessary. In response, the budget doubled the Ontario Small Business Support Grant. Now eligible businesses will receive up to \$40,000 and a minimum of \$20,000. Through these two rounds of support, over 120,000 businesses are going to receive an estimated \$3.4 billion in assistance.

Some of these businesses that presented were also in the hospitality and tourism sector. As our Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries always says, these businesses have been the hardest hit, the first hit, and will be the last to recover. Unfortunately, some of them were not eligible for the Ontario Small Business Support Grant, so to help them, we are launching a new grant specifically for the hospitality and tourism sector so that hotels, motels, travel agencies, amusement parks, summer camps and the like can get the assistance that they need and deserve.

As an avid outdoorsman and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, I am very excited that hunting and fishing camps will also be eligible for this grant. Many of these camps and lodges are located in northern Ontario and often rely on visitors and business from south of the border. They are facing yet another year of uncertainty. In 2020, our government provided \$1.2 million in relief by waiving certain licences and crown land user fees for these businesses, and we are once again waiving these fees for these businesses this year, providing another \$1.3 million in relief for the important industry that is built on the back of Ontario's heritage.

Some \$621 million in support has been made available for the tourism and hospitality industry since the beginning of the pandemic, including a \$400-million increase in new initiatives.

Announced in our budget was the \$100-million tourism recovery program, which will help tourism operators, anchor businesses, and attractions.

Our tourism industry is in for a long road to recovery, and our government is continuing to honour our commitment to stopping at nothing to get them through these tough times.

Speaking of commitments, the budget is anchored on two: protecting people's health, and protecting our economy.

At the crux of it, this is a public health emergency. Without hesitation, the Premier and the Minister of Health have provided hospitals with additional funding, beds and support throughout this pandemic. Over \$5.1 billion has gone just into the hospital sector alone. This additional funding has created over 3,100 new hospital beds across the province. Never before has the government created the equivalent of six large hospitals in just one year.

Lee Fairclough, president of St. Mary's General Hospital in Kitchener, said this "budget will help hospitals serve our communities through this pandemic, address the backlogs in care and needed capacity (particularly given growth in our region) and support recovery."

Along with increasing hospital capacity, over \$1 billion has gone to purchasing PPE for front-line health care

workers. In fact, we've helped ramp up an entire industry of Ontario-made PPE manufacturers. Before the pandemic, the province was relying on other countries for masks, gloves and other vital supplies. Never again will this be the case. We haven't seen companies shift production and scale up like this since the Second World War.

It's true: We are in a war against this deadly virus. There is only one way to defeat it, and that is through vaccinations.

Last week, new records in numbers of people vaccinated every day were set, with over 100,000 daily doses administered on several occasions. In under two weeks, one million shots got into the arms of eager Ontarians. Now that the federal government is providing us with a more adequate supply, we are close to using our full capacity to vaccinate 150,000 people every day here in the province of Ontario.

I want to be absolutely clear: Despite what we've heard from members opposite, there are no vaccines sitting in freezers right now. That would be counterintuitive to what we are trying to do to end this pandemic. Every dose that Ontario has received is being given to a person who is eligible, and this is being supported by a \$1-billion commitment to getting everyone who wants a vaccine their shot. Nineteen new pharmacies in Waterloo region have come online to administer the AstraZeneca vaccine to those who are older than 55. Late last week, primary care physicians in my riding also began offering shots. There are now a total of 32 pharmacies, primary care physicians and clinics administering vaccines in Waterloo region.

I want to close by acknowledging that the budget also recognizes those who have had an especially difficult time during the pandemic. As a father of five, I know first-hand how challenging it is to try to arrange child care for working parents. Our Minister of Education gets it too, which is why he was quick to act and make free emergency child care available early last year and during the temporary shift to remote learning again in January.

Affordable, accessible child care has been a priority for our government even before the pandemic. Back in 2019, we introduced the Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses tax credit, or the CARE tax credit. Eligible families can now claim up to 75% of their child care expenses. CARE put money back into the wallets of Ontario families where it belongs, and this year it is being topped up by 20%. There are parents across the province who have had to take off work during temporary school closures. Some have chosen to leave their careers to stay home with their children. While Ontario created 182,000 new jobs last month, re-entering the workforce is still significantly more challenging than it was 13 months ago. Unaffordable child care should not be a barrier to earning a paycheck.

There are some workers who are using COVID-19 as an opportunity to get retrained and pursue a second career. Going back to school and starting in a new field is a huge decision for anyone to make. It's an investment of time and hard-earned dollars. To make it just a little bit easier

for those people, the budget introduced the Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit. It would provide up to \$2,000 or 50% of expenses related to retraining. An estimated 230,000 Ontarians will benefit from this credit.

Some sectors are recovering faster than others, and there is a growing demand for those employees to find qualified workers. Take manufacturing, for example: There are now more people working in the manufacturing sector than there were pre-pandemic. Trucking is another sector. Postings are now at the same level they were back in early 2020. I had the pleasure of joining the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development and the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues last week to announce funding for a program that will train 30 women and under-represented groups to become truck drivers. Women make up less than 4% of truck drivers in our province, and we need to do more to promote opportunities like this to them.

1440

We heard from one young trucker named Hayley, who was actually coming to us live from Ohio, I believe, to take part in the announcement and say how great it has been for her to get into this sector. She really, really loved the fact that we were putting money into this and encouraging more people—especially women and young people—to get involved.

We've got a budget here that listens to the people and responds to their priorities and their needs right now. It puts more money back into the wallet of the taxpayer, while also investing in health care, the economy and vital community infrastructure. The people of Ontario have been asked to make significant sacrifices this year, but at the end of the day, as the Minister of Finance has said, without healthy people, we cannot have a healthy economy.

The 2021 budget will help hard-working families and business owners. Ontarians of all stripes will have something in it for them. It doesn't duplicate what taxpayers are already funding, like the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit, which provides four weeks of paid sick days for workers. Instead, it looks ahead to what the people of this province are going to need when we finally turn the corner out of this pandemic. They are going to need opportunity, improved infrastructure, the right skills and better connectivity, both to the online world and between regions.

The road has been long, but our action plan to protect people's health and the economy will bring us to the end. As has been said repeatedly, hope is on the horizon. Soon, Ontario's economic engines will be ready to re-fire, and when they do, people and businesses will be there and ready because of the actions that our government is taking today, actions that are leading to results for Waterloo region and my constituents of Kitchener–Conestoga—real, tangible things that are supported by my community, like by the regional chair, president of the chamber of commerce, and the president of one of our region's leading cardiac hospitals. Not only are they a leading cardiac hospital in the region, but they are one of the leading cardiac hospitals in the entire country.

As I spoke about extensively, this budget was built through consultations—consultations that I had the privilege to be a part of. It reflects what I heard in those consultations, it includes things that I have heard for years, and that is why I will be supporting this motion and standing behind our government's 2021 budget. I encourage all of the members in this House to do the same.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): It's time for questions.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I listened intently to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga. He talked about a lot of things.

We know this budget doesn't have paid sick days. On the other side, they talk about federal paid sick days. We know the differences—a majority of the folks in Ontario don't qualify for federal paid sick days.

The member also talked about expanding the small business—with hospitality and hotels. We know now some of our small businesses do a vital job.

My question is, does this expansion include taxi drivers, who have not been included before? There have been questions about their eligibility. I know that they are hospitality. They're contributing significantly, taking people from point A to point B. Why are you not including them and including the others? This is not fair.

Mr. Mike Harris: I think the members opposite should maybe get together and huddle up and kind of discuss what the issue is with paid sick leave. We heard one member from Brampton saying there wasn't enough money in the program. Well, there's over \$600 million in the program—\$600 million in that program. Then we've got, now, this member standing up and saying, well, that the eligibility isn't enough. What I would recommend, maybe, to those members opposite is that they go out into their community, and instead of saying the province isn't putting enough money forward or there's not enough eligibility criteria, maybe they should go out and actually tell people that this program exists so that those people can apply for the program and so they can make sure that they can get up to four weeks off if they need to stay home.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for his speech. I know he talked a bit about tourism and the importance of the investments for tourism, and certainly that's a sector that's been really hard hit in this pandemic time.

I wonder if the member could tell us a bit more about the important supports that are in this budget. I believe it totals some \$400 million to support the tourism sector, including the new \$100-million tourism grant and hospitality grant, as well as the planned tax credit that's going to be coming forward of \$150 million when it is safe to be able to get out, see our province and have a staycation in the province this summer.

Mr. Mike Harris: To the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka: I really appreciate the question because, as not only the member for Kitchener–Conestoga—I'm also the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Natural

Resources and Forestry—there's quite a lot that we do with our ministry that involves many of the tourism operators in your riding.

Overall, we're talking about \$621 million of support that's been made available to the tourism sector, and \$400 million of that, as the member stated, is in new initiatives. I think one thing to highlight, too, is that our ministry, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, is providing relief to a total of \$1.3 million. I know it may seem small, but to these organizations this is a big deal. These are licensing fees, crown land use fees that they aren't going to have to pay this year. So there is a lot of support coming for his riding and also other members of the tourism industry.

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

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Just like my colleague from York South–Weston, I listened intently to the member across in terms of what he was saying regarding the budget.

Now, he did mention—and I'm not sure if he wants to maybe explain what he meant by this. He said, "Without healthy people we cannot have a healthy economy." Saying that and talking about paid sick days, in my riding of Brampton North and across Peel region we have many essential workers who have no choice but to go to work. Without paid sick days they cannot stay home because then they cannot pay their rent and they can't pay their high auto insurance.

It's not just myself saying it, Mr. Speaker. It's people in the health field; it's mayors—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pose your question, please.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: —including Mayor Bonnie Crombie, who said that she's completely disappointed in the Mississauga provincial members of Parliament. She stated that they know how important sick days are—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you very much. We'll go back to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga to respond.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much, Speaker. Listen, I don't know how much more clear I can make it. If we're going to talk about sick days, we can talk about sick days. There's over \$600 million in a program that the members opposite don't want to talk about. They just want to talk about having to gouge taxpayers more dollars to pay for a provincially funded program that would duplicate what the federal government is already doing. To me, that doesn't make sense. There's one taxpayer here in the province of Ontario.

If you want to talk about healthy Ontarians and what that means for the economy, our government is proposing to invest \$16.3 billion, the most ever, just into health care in the province in this budget. It's an absolutely unprecedented amount of money, and it's done to make sure that we are able to provide the opportunity for people to be as healthy as possible, so that they can help stimulate the economy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Niagara West.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I'm sure the member has also heard from many families in his riding who have benefitted from being able to ensure that they were able to access the Support for Learners funding in 2020. Of course, this was funding that was set aside to ensure that families were able to afford the at-home learning that was so critical last year, whether it's supplies or whether it's the various costs that come associated with that learning.

I'm just wondering if the member could speak a little bit about the COVID-19 child benefit and what that will mean to so many families across the province when it comes to ensuring that they have what they need to support—whether that's learning or the various costs that are associated with having children at home in the middle of a pandemic.

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Mr. Mike Harris: Absolutely, and congratulations. I don't think I've had a chance to rise officially and congratulate you on becoming a new father yourself, so welcome to the parental clan. It's a lot of fun.

Listen, Speaker, all joking aside, as a parent of five—actually, I think a couple of my kids, who are home right now on spring break who have nothing better to do, are watching dear old dad on TV—

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Harris: It's difficult, I know. But listen, it's really important that we continue this program. This is one thing that we heard quite a bit about in our office. We had a lot of emails, a lot of calls regarding this. We're actually going to be doubling the support for parents program to, I believe, \$400 for children up to grade 12 and then \$500 for people up to in their early 20s with special needs—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Well, dear old dad, you have 10 seconds to conclude.

Mr. Mike Harris: It's really great to see that program continue and double and be out there helping support parents in this province. Thank you, Speaker.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to my colleague for his notes on the budget. He delved into the area of procurement, and this is a new interest of mine. He said that the government has stimulated this new economy around PPE development.

In our own ridings, we have Canadian Shield, who can't get their products into our hospital sector, so the procurement supply chain is failing, and Eclipse down in Cambridge—I'm wearing one of their masks today. They're made in Ontario, creating jobs in Ontario, creating the product for the supply chain. These are things that need to happen, but these companies have been left behind by this government. This budget does not address this in a meaningful way. Why not? Why have you failed to address the importance of procurement and the supply chain from a domestic perspective?

Mr. Mike Harris: Well, thank you very much, and thank you to my wife for making this mask right in the heart of Kitchener–Conestoga.

Listen, Speaker, I've had a chance to meet with the leaders of Canadian Shield. Jeremy Hedges has been very

open and forthcoming over the last little while. I know the member from Waterloo has also had an opportunity to meet with him, and we've discussed a lot of the problems that we're facing when it comes to procurement.

The reality is that unfortunately we're working off systems that were built under the previous Liberal government. We have made some significant strides over the three years that we've been government in moving forward with modernizing procurement, but we're still unfortunately left with these entrenched Liberal systems that have been around for decades, that everybody seems to be trying to revert back to.

Well, Speaker, we're continuing this consultation. We're trying to move forward. We're working actively with the Ministry of Economic Development to right some of these issues and we will continue to do that for the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We don't have enough time for another question and answer, so we'll go to further debate.

Ms. Doly Begum: I rise to speak on behalf of the good people of my riding of Scarborough Southwest on this budget bill. This pandemic has not only been a public health crisis; it is a crisis that has exposed numerous silent pandemics that our governments—I think both governments—have ignored for many, many years. The systems in place have not worked for those who are vulnerable in our society for a long time.

For folks in my community of Scarborough Southwest, a riding that is home to many low-income, racialized front-line workers, the systemic failures and years of neglect have made it worse for the people during this pandemic. People in my community have struggled with poverty, housing, homelessness, access to health care and making ends meet on social programs such as ODSP and OW for years. But what this pandemic did is highlight the cumulative result of neglecting vulnerable communities.

For the past year, my office has heard from many constituents facing horrible conditions, from jobs to housing to health care to schools. I hear from individuals who have lost their jobs, minimum-wage jobs, and are struggling to keep up with their bills, now living in fear of evictions while trying to put food on the table for their families. When I looked at this budget, I was hopeful, thinking there might be some support for a lot of these people who are struggling.

Let's start with small businesses. Every day I hear from people who have supported their families and our community through their small businesses for decades. These businesses have been forced to close their doors because they don't meet the criteria for support from this government. While the federal government failed with their criteria—a lot of these businesses from the first wave to the second wave did not qualify for support—eventually, when the provincial government came out with support, we thought, "You know what? There might be some hope for people." Unfortunately, a lot of our businesses continue to be left behind.

A few weeks ago I met with the coordinator from the Crossroads BIA. I want to give a big shout-out to our

Crossroads BIA and all the board members, who are doing a fantastic job with their own businesses and watching out for the local businesses in Scarborough Southwest. I met with the coordinator, John Beers, and we walked through the neighbourhood, meeting with local business owners. Many were concerned that the Ontario business grant was ending on April 7. I recognize that the Premier extended it for a week—for a week. And this extension, as many businesses and as John mentioned, although it was helpful, was not what they were expecting. We're in the middle of the third wave; people are still struggling. There should have been more support and the grant should have continued. They wanted to know why it is even ending. While we're in the middle of a pandemic there should be more support.

A lot of the businesses in Toronto are suffering more than other parts of the region in the province, which means they should get a higher amount for the grant. Many small businesses haven't even applied yet or understand how they can. So here we have our BIA, for example, that's trying to help people apply. Many mom-and-pop shops don't have in-house accountants to pull everything together in time, so we have many businesses that lost out on the opportunity to even apply for this grant.

I'm really calling on this government and I'm calling on all members across the aisle to consider bringing back the grant and allowing for a lot of these businesses that haven't been able to apply, and to extend the deadline, because these businesses will close their doors forever. We're talking about small mom-and-pop shops. We're talking about small businesses in our province that are the backbone of this province, Mr. Speaker.

On top of the program continuing, there is also a strong request for the grant to be larger, as I mentioned, for places like Scarborough and Toronto, where expenses like rent and insurance, for example, are higher than other places in the province. Toronto has been in lockdown for longer. That should be taken into consideration—more restrictions and more requirements. The patios opened up for a whole week. That cost a lot of businesses a lot of money, and then a week later, they had to shut down again. That meant a lot of money going down the drain.

Businesses in Toronto, for example, and in Scarborough have way more costs, and on top of that, when they don't qualify for any support, we're really leaving them behind and telling them that we, as representatives, don't care for the backbone of this province.

In addition, my colleagues have talked about how this business grant would have actually protected all of the businesses across the province. So I want to talk about our taxi drivers. Our taxi drivers are essential workers. Many of them are helping people right now get their vaccines. They're delivering food. They're doing the work that many people really need us to do, and our taxi drivers have been left behind all throughout this pandemic. They have lost a significant amount of income during this pandemic, if not all income. I can't even imagine—for many of the uncles in my community who are taxi drivers and who have health conditions, it was all of the income lost. They didn't have any support. They didn't qualify for anything.

And those who are still trying to be out there, risking their lives, many of them received zero support. While some qualified, some didn't, with completely arbitrary decision-making. I'm asking this House: What was the logic behind that? Why did some taxi drivers qualify while others didn't? What is the rationale? Because there are lot of other taxi drivers who should qualify, who have the exact same credentials, and they should be qualifying for the grant.

This morning I listened to Kristine Hubbard, the CEO of Beck Taxi. She talked about how her taxi drivers for Beck Taxi and many others have been left behind, and about what's happening with our province. Not only did they not qualify for any support; right now, when we look at the list of essential workers, they're not even on phase 2 of the vaccine rollout, Mr. Speaker. Forget phase 1; they're not even considered in phase 2 for the vaccine rollout. We're talking about people who are out there every single day, risking their lives, and yet our government cannot consider them to be essential workers, so these people can get their vaccines? Unbelievable.

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Mr. Speaker, I want to move on to health care. Ontario Hospital Association CEO Anthony Dale and the OHA had submitted to the government before their budget release, asking the government to make significant investment, and they actually broke it down for the government. When the budget came out, Anthony Dale, the CEO and president of OHA, pointed out that the budget commitment for health care base funding falls \$82 million short of the OHA's submission. When we know what we are facing right now with our health care needs—the fact that all non-emergency surgeries have been put aside, the fact that we are at capacity in our hospitals—we should be investing more in our hospitals. We should be spending more in our health care system—\$82 million short of the OHA's submission.

And if I were to focus on Scarborough, time and time again it has been made evident that the health care infrastructure in Scarborough is in dire need, as well, of investment. It is worth noting that Scarborough and its health care needs were not mentioned once in this budget—not even once. I have been hearing from the Scarborough Health Network that their ICUs are overwhelmed with COVID-19 cases, and the modelling data that we just looked at this past week shows that it's only going to get worse. We're in the top three for the highest COVID cases in ICUs, while having one of the lowest amounts of supports and resources.

This morning, Mr. Speaker, I asked the Minister of Health for equitable vaccine distribution, because the government has failed to prioritize communities like ours in Scarborough for the fast rollout of vaccines. This is not new. We have seen this happen twice now, and we're seeing it happen again. This government has made no financial commitment to supporting health care infrastructure in our community in Scarborough, and clearly in other parts as well, while making fancy photo ops, because that seems to be what this government is very good at. When a

clinic opens up, the minister and the Premier show up in Scarborough, but when we talk about a new hospital in Scarborough, nothing. When we talk about real investments in Scarborough, we're still waiting.

Speaker, when I look at this whole budget, the entire budget, the total program spending of this budget went down from past years, despite the fact that we're now facing a pandemic and this third wave, which is deadlier than the first two waves.

We're seeing a decrease in education, as well. In fact, this government has reduced their education spending from past years, when we know how much more investment we need in our schools. In Scarborough Southwest, for example, some of our infrastructures are so old, they need so much work that the repair cost is as much as building a new school. How are our children, our students, our educators supposed to be safe without proper ventilation, without being able to open their windows? And now, in this budget, we are seeing a cut to our education spending—unbelievable. And while the Minister of Education continues to pat himself on the back, in reality, they're actually putting our kids at risk. That's what we're facing right now. We have had regions like TDSB for example, where Toronto Public Health has had to close down schools here, because schools have been declared unsafe.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also talk about the fact that this budget failed to mention supports for children with autism and special needs. This has gone on since, it seems, the day this government took office. The government continues to fail families that they have heavily neglected for years. First it was the Liberal government, and now we have the Conservative government, and those living with autism and special needs are facing a different type of crisis during this pandemic. They have lost all support. They're stuck at home. They need help. With schools closing, they have experienced significant setbacks, yet this government has not committed any support in this budget.

The government has also failed to include support for critical programs like ODSP and OW, Ontario Works, programs that are meant to support the most vulnerable in our society, folks who have been systematically neglected for decades, especially during this pandemic. Right now, this would have been the time to introduce something that provided people with hope, and this government failed to do that, Mr. Speaker.

We should have supported our essential workers. Last week, I was surprised to see—I shouldn't be surprised, but you know I'm an optimistic person. I'm an optimist. I like to feel that the government side will understand. When the member from Hamilton Mountain introduced her motion for mental health support for essential workers, I was surprised to see the government vote against that. Front-line essential workers and personal support workers, grocery workers, servers in cafeterias, people who have been carrying us through this pandemic have not received enough support from our government. For a year now, they have been calling on this government for paid sick

days. I know I'm going to get government members asking me about the federal program. I want to be very, very clear: The federal program is not paid sick days. Of course the government has zero indication to support workers. Instead, they have been passing off an emergency support program that the federal government is giving—which, by the way, you have to qualify for. You have to request the federal program—that's not paid sick days. And if you have COVID and if you're stuck at home, after you've missed a payment from your work, then you can qualify for the federal program, which, by the way, is nowhere near enough what people make even on minimum wage.

Now I want to move on to the environment, because one of the things that we're already facing and we're going to be looking at right after this pandemic—when I hope it's over—is the environmental crisis. This government's track record on environment has been deplorable at best. It was using MZO's left and right to build over protected lands to make way for developers. Funding for the environment ministry has plateaued, and there is zero commitment in this budget for climate change initiatives. This budget lacks insight for what the future of a green and sustainable Ontario should be. Earlier last year, this government cut the powers of conservation authorities to make way for developments on protected lands, conservation authorities which exist to protect our province's wetlands and green spaces.

I'm running out of time, so I want to move on to a few other things as quickly as possible, Mr. Speaker. There are quite a few things that I wish I could highlight, like long-term care. The fact that there is no commitment to reinstate the comprehensive resident quality inspections in long-term care—something we have seen over the past year more than ever before, the need for that. We need to have the comprehensive resident quality inspections, especially after what has happened and the thousands of deaths in our long-term-care homes, Mr. Speaker. Why isn't that part of this budget?

As I close off, because I'm running out of time, I'd like to close off highlighting the need for equity and sustainable investment. As the member for Scarborough Southwest, a community with the highest child poverty rate in Toronto, I have on many occasions raised the need for significant investment in Scarborough, from education to hospitals to housing to child care to jobs. Child poverty rises when there are systemic failures in all of these sectors. They're intersecting. If we as policy-makers fail to address them at the root, it will continue, Mr. Speaker. This pandemic has shaken the fragile foundation of many of these sectors and unveiled the dire need for more investment.

It was extremely disappointing to see that this government's budget does not even mention the term “poverty,” not once. The term “poverty”—at a time during this pandemic when people are going homeless, people are choosing between paying their rent or buying their prescription medicines—was not even mentioned in this budget.

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My community is home to families and children who have been failed by this government and governments

before—the previous Liberal government—who have made cuts over and over again in these sectors. You have to understand that when you do that, you're pushing them further into poverty. After the year we had—a year that exposed the harsh realities of those who are living in poverty, a crisis that leaves people in our communities to choose between paying their rent and putting food on the table, pushing them into homelessness—how can this government, in good conscience, say that this budget is adequate?

When there is zero commitment to equity, to anti-poverty strategies, we cannot pass a budget that does not focus on anti-poverty or equity. When I look at this budget, there is no hope for people. When you're making cuts to education, when you're making cuts to health care, when you're not even just keeping up with the base amount necessary, that is not adequate, Mr. Speaker.

I want to end off by highlighting a few things that I'm noticing. One of the things is the need for equitable vaccination. There are a few things that we can do right now to support people. One of them is paid sick days; another one is supporting our small businesses; another one is providing equitable distribution of vaccines. Mr. Speaker, I'm running out of time, but the sad part is that, right now, we have so many essential workers in places like Scarborough who don't have an equitable amount of vaccines. Just this past week, I talked to the Scarborough Health Network. When we look at the investment that we're making across the province, we have to prioritize areas that are hard hit, that are high risk. It was extremely disappointing to see this morning that the government has prioritized neighbourhoods that are not even high risk and are giving vaccines to those areas.

I want to be very, very clear: I want every single person in this province to be able to get a vaccine. But I'm saying that when you are prioritizing neighbourhoods and when you're trying to have a strategy to end the spread of COVID-19 and protect people, you have to do it very smartly. You have to make sure that you're prioritizing neighbourhoods like ours in Scarborough, where we have communities that are extremely, extremely badly hit by COVID-19. Those essential workers, those racialized communities need to have their vaccines. That delay is unacceptable, and I'm asking the government to do better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The first question in this round is offered to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite for her comments. I was listening intently, and I can't help but focus on what you said at the end there, that neighbourhoods in Scarborough should be prioritized. It's important that Scarborough get vaccines, and we agree over here. We think it's very important that Scarborough get vaccines and that they prioritize them. I want to ask the member opposite if she could name a single postal code in Scarborough which is not a high-priority neighbourhood and designated to receive vaccines for high priority?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Scarborough Southwest to respond.

Ms. Doly Begum: I can, actually. I believe M1K is not included. In fact, a significant portion south of Kingston is not included as well. There are people whose neighbours are able to qualify, but they're not. In fact, I can send you the entire list. If the member from Eglinton–Lawrence would help me get more vaccines to SHN, the Scarborough Health Network that I was meeting with last week—because the reason they're not able to push through with the mobile clinics in many of our neighbourhoods, including some of the PC ridings, is because we don't have enough vaccines. I can give her the exact list of postal codes, the exact communities—in fact, the street names—if she would like that. Great question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Brampton East.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: I want to thank my colleague and friend for her really strong words today. She's a very, very strong advocate for Scarborough and she's fighting incredibly hard for her community.

I really just want to just hear more about this idea of an equitable approach to vaccines, how Scarborough and other communities are not getting the support they need, and what you would like to see to help address these hotspots. What are communities saying to you, and how do they need more help?

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank my colleague from Brampton North for his question—

Interjection: East.

Ms. Doly Begum: —Brampton East for his question. I know he is a great advocate for his community as well, another community that is hard-hit by COVID-19, and he's also been fighting for equitable distribution of vaccines in his region. In regions like Peel and in Scarborough or Toronto, we need to be able to look at the population as well as the types of workers and the communities that we are serving. When we talk about essential workers, when we talk about multi-generational homes, when we talk about a large proportion of seniors or seniors' homes, as well as a lot of racialized communities that do not have access to vaccines, we need to be able to do better with language barriers, with providing enough vaccinations, making sure that—Scarborough has over 650,000 people; we could give them more vaccines.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: You know, without trying to politicize this comment, and I hope the member opposite doesn't take it the wrong way, we only have a finite amount of vaccines from the federal government. Granted, they have said that they are going to be upping the supply over the next little while, but the fact is we're still being shorted, right on down to every other part of this province, not just Scarborough. That's a problem with procurement. It's a problem that Canada was really late to the game, trying to get vaccines ordered when everybody else already had their orders in. So my question to the member opposite—and again, I don't want her to take this the wrong way—if there are more vaccines that she wants to see allocated to parts of Scarborough, which parts of the

province would she like to see those vaccines taken away from?

Ms. Doly Begum: What's extremely disappointing to see is that this government did not actually have a plan, especially last week when they announced the 18-plus vaccinations. For a week, I've had people calling my office asking what's going on, because there was no information whatsoever, and TPH—Toronto Public Health—had no information whatsoever.

So if you know that the federal government is giving you vaccines, you should come up with a strategy for where these vaccines will be going, and when. Don't put them in the freezer. Let's make sure that they're rolled out as soon as possible, and then join us in asking the federal government for more vaccines.

Interjections.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: I am not saying that the federal government is off the hook for getting more vaccines. I am with you on that. They should be providing more vaccines. But I'm saying that you should do a better job in fighting for that, as well as providing local areas, like Scarborough, that need more vaccines—get them those vaccines as soon as possible.

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

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I want to thank my colleague from Scarborough. The lack of paid sick days is a health hazard. We all know that. The government seems to be the only ones that don't believe it's important. If you can let everybody know what the importance is of having paid sick days, especially in your riding, and in my riding, where we have essential workers in manufacturing, in trucking, in logistics, and they have to go to work. They have to go to work, but when they get sick, they don't have adequate enough paid sick days for them to stay home, and this is the problem.

If we are going to be serious about taking care of the economy, of taking care of workers—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pose your question, please.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: —we have to be serious about the pandemic. So why do you think the government is so stuck on not providing paid sick days, and can you tell us what benefit it is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Back to the member from Scarborough Southwest to respond.

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member from Brampton North for his question. I know he's been an advocate for paid sick days, and for his community, as well, especially during this pandemic.

One of the things that is extremely disappointing to see is the provincial government trying to take credit for a program that has been ad hoc and put by the federal government—which is not paid sick days. It does not cover the essential parts of what paid sick days look like, which is a smooth rollout. When someone is not able to come to work because they're not feeling well, they can

stay home, and they're able to continue to get their income. That's what paid sick days look like. Right now, the risk is that we're having a lot of essential workers who are going to work while being sick, and that means more spread of COVID-19. Unfortunately, that's causing a larger spread in communities across the province.

1520

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Niagara West.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the member opposite for her presentation with regard to the budget. I just wanted to ask the member opposite: I've had the chance to go through some of your social media channels. I know that you, as do all members in this House, use those to ensure that our constituents are accessing the services they rely upon. But I haven't seen you, at least in the past month, make any mention of the availability of paid sick days through the federal government. I'm wondering if you have, in fact, shared with your constituents that reality and what they're able to access.

Ms. Doly Begum: I'm glad that he's getting some inspiration from my Facebook page. I'll ask all members and anyone watching to check out my Facebook page: It's Doly Begum, or #DolyforSSW. We provide a lot of good information, including on paid sick days. In fact, I actually did a press conference with the leader of the official opposition about paid sick days, and one of the things I talked about was the federal program. That was broadcast live on my Facebook page, talking about what the federal program looks like and what the provincial program looks like. I actually explained how you can qualify for the federal program, and the sad reality is a lot of people don't qualify for the federal program.

Thank you, Speaker. Great question—

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

The member for York South–Weston.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I would like to first thank my colleague from Scarborough Southwest for the eloquent presentation about what this budget doesn't have. She talked about how this budget doesn't have support for vulnerable people, support for ODSP, Ontario Works and also even for young people. The issue of equity is very important.

We know that also small businesses—I asked a question earlier about—the member from Kitchener–Conestoga. He hasn't answered my question. I know that taxi drivers—you talked in detail about the work they're doing. They are front-line workers and they have not been included here in the support for small businesses. If you could talk about the importance of and the risk to front-line workers, such as the work the taxi drivers are doing. They are part of the hospitalities, but they are not being included here. They are very important to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pose your question, please.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: My question is: It's very important that we support all small businesses, not some. Could you

talk about the importance of supporting all small businesses?

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member from York South–Weston for his excellent work in his riding on many, many different things, including tenants' rights, including the support for taxi drivers. I know you've been speaking for a lot of your small businesses as well.

It's really disappointing to see the way taxi drivers—who really have been pushed into becoming front-line workers. They are essential workers. They're on the front lines. They're risking their lives. I hope everybody listening on the government side will go back, maybe have a caucus meeting and reconsider, because these guys really need the support. They need to qualify for the grants. They should be considered as sole proprietors who have lost their income. They need to be getting those grants.

Taxi drivers should be included in this. Thank you very much for the—

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

Further debate?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Speaker, there are a lot of issues that I want to bring up right now and a lot of issues that I want to discuss about the budget and its lack for Brampton and its lack for, frankly, all across Ontario. There are a few issues that I'm going to go through sequentially in my comments today.

I'll start off with something I've mentioned beforehand and something that's incredibly problematic to what's happening in Brampton. Brampton is a city of over 600,000 people, yet we only have one hospital. This hospital is chronically underfunded and chronically overcrowded despite all of the issues that Brampton is facing with our health care system and despite the fact that Brampton city council actually declared a health care crisis before COVID-19. During this time of pandemic, we're not seeing support that Brampton needs to both fight our health care crisis and to fight COVID-19.

In addition, the Conservative government had an opportunity in their budget to address Brampton's health care crisis. Let's be really clear; I talked about this earlier today and I'm going to talk about it again: Brampton's health care crisis is a product of neglect from past Conservative and Liberal governments. The Conservative and Liberal governments have neglected Brampton and resulted in our current health care crisis.

Let's look at, specifically, the Liberal track record in Brampton. For 15 years, the Liberals were elected in Ontario, and for 15 years, they chronically allowed for the underfunding of Brampton Civic.

Let's look at the track record of the Liberal government in Brampton. They had 15 years they were elected in government in Ontario, and for 15 years the result was hallway medicine in Brampton, where thousands of people were being treated in hallways because there was no access in any of the rooms at Brampton Civic. Brampton Civic, our only hospital for over 600,000 people, was chronically underfunded and overcrowded, and as a whole, there were no plans to expand Brampton's health

care. Brampton is a city of over 600,000 people, and we need three hospitals. That means converting Peel Memorial from a health centre into a hospital; that means building an additional standalone hospital; and it means properly funding Brampton Civic.

But the Liberal government for 15 years did none of this. Instead, they allowed our health care system to get worse and worse and weaker and weaker. And frankly, under the Conservative government, we've seen Brampton's health care go from bad to worse.

Now, in this budget, the Conservative government had an opportunity to address Brampton's health care crisis, but instead of doing so, they did something which was, frankly, incredibly confusing to folks across the province. We saw media, we saw people in Brampton, everyone speaking about the confusing nature of the government's announcement, where they said that a hospital was being announced in Brampton. But when we looked at the budget, we saw not a single dollar allocated to the hospital. We saw no plan for a hospital. We saw no timeline.

There was such a high degree of confusion towards this, frankly, empty promise for Brampton that the Premier himself had to come to Brampton to clarify his position. When he came, what did we see? We saw the Premier double down and admit that it was a fake election promise and that shovels were not going to hit the ground until 2023. Let's be really clear: The next election is in 2022. So he's promising that shovels might hit the ground in 2023. The Conservative government's own internal communications were incredibly confusing, because the press release issued by the Conservative government, by the official government press release that came out, said that it's anticipated that shovels will hit the ground in 2023. So even there, there's no commitment. Brampton is struggling now. Brampton is struggling today and we need investment now and today to address our health care crisis.

The Conservative government, when I posed this question previously to them, always say the same lines about what they're promising, their empty promise for 2023. What they don't realize is that Brampton Civic is underfunded today. Often the Conservative government will respond and say, "It takes time to put these plans together." Well, Brampton Civic is underfunded today. Brampton is overcrowded today. You could fund them today. You could fund our only hospital for over 600,000 people today adequately to address the fact that we are ground zero for hallway medicine; that there are thousands of people who are treated in the hallway because there's no room within the rooms at Brampton Civic. Instead, they're silent on that. They instead just continually rely on this fake, empty promise of a hospital coming to Brampton, when no such thing was outlined in the budget. All that was mentioned was one single line saying an in-patient wing, with no details, no money, nothing else assigned towards it.

In addition, let's look further towards the empty promises that are being put towards Brampton. Brampton is a city of over 600,000 people. It's an incredibly young city. It's a city full of people of young age and there are a

lot of vibrant students and young families there. And despite being the ninth largest city in Canada, it's a city that doesn't have a university. Despite 15 years of neglect from the Liberal government, despite the fact that the Liberal government allowed Brampton to grow and grow and grow without having the vision of investing and building institutions so Brampton would properly be resourced with the institutions that our city needs to thrive, when they finally did do a commitment for investment in a university, at the eleventh hour the Conservative government cancelled it. Out of hopes to save \$90 million, the Conservative government cancelled Brampton's hope for a full-fledged university.

I also want to talk about how financially irresponsible that is. If you look at the studies, it's clear: The university in Brampton would have brought, I think, upwards of \$200 million of investment into Brampton over the course of time. It's clear, because universities bring investment in infrastructure, housing, jobs, innovation—across the board. When businesses want to set up in a city, of course they look at if there's access to an easily accessible, educated workforce, and a university helps support that.

1530

The Conservative government cancelled Brampton's hope for a university at the eleventh hour, and what did they propose instead? In this budget, once again, something incredibly confusing was put forward. The Conservative government advertised this as a medical university coming to Brampton, but when you actually look at what it was—it was some money given to Ryerson University so they could prepare a proposal to then present to the Conservative government. That is not a university. That is not a medical university. That's some money to go towards planning to maybe put in a university. But the Conservative government rolled out the red carpet for this huge announcement and said, "Brampton is getting a hospital, and Brampton is getting a medical university." Quite frankly, factually, none of those things were present in the budget—so much so that the Conservative government got called out on this time and again, and the Premier had to come to Brampton. He clarified himself, saying that this is an empty election promise. They have no intention of doing anything with this project until maybe 2023, after the next election.

A university that was cancelled in Brampton was then instead—what was offered up was some money, given to Ryerson University so they could create a proposal for a university that might come to Brampton or might not. We don't know, because the Conservative government has no commitment for this in their budget. If they were serious, they would put dollars behind their promises. That's the difference between an empty promise and actual action to help Brampton. But all we've seen so far in this budget is empty promises towards Brampton.

Now let's look at the other areas in which Brampton is being left behind. I've talked about this before, and I'll say it again: Brampton is a city of over 600,000 people, and Brampton is a city that is struggling right now. It's struggling immensely with the COVID-19 pandemic. We're

struggling because of the fact that we are a city of essential workers who, quite frankly, don't have the choice to work from home. These are folks who move our economy, and they have to go to work. When they go to work, they further subject themselves to COVID-19. They subject themselves to getting sick. They subject themselves to a whole slew of issues, because they don't have the option to work from home. They have to go to work, and we've seen the impact of it—this immense spread of COVID-19 at workplaces. You can look at the numbers. It's devastating. It's staggering to see how much the spread of COVID-19 is happening in Brampton, especially in workplaces. We see time and again the fact that workplaces are one of the largest areas of spread for COVID-19, and the health care officials in Brampton have also repeated this message time and again, saying that workplaces are where COVID-19 is getting out of control in Brampton.

That's why there are folks who are making a very legitimate and important call for the fact that we need paid sick days. Paid sick days are something that—and it's not just the NDP. I'll really challenge the Conservative government on this, because I know that after I'm done my speech, they're going to get up and then they're all going to get very angry at paid sick days. But you have to understand that it's mayors of major cities, health care officials, health care experts, public health officials—a whole slew of people who have come together—who are clearly saying that Brampton and folks in Ontario deserve paid sick days. Instead of actually providing this kind of support—we're seeing Brampton being left behind time and again, and it's unfair. It's not appropriate, and it's ultimately disenfranchising our entire city and our entire province. Our city requires better and Ontario requires better than what's being presented right now.

When we look at the other issues and the lack in this budget, there are a few things that come to mind. I'm going to talk about some specific groups that have been mentioned, and I really want to reaffirm their issues.

My friend mentioned it earlier—we talked about taxi drivers and folks in the taxi industry. They are struggling right now. They are at the forefront of this COVID-19 pandemic. They are struggling across the board. They are in a line of work that puts them in direct exposure to COVID-19. They are in a line of work that is putting their lives at risk. We know the lives of taxi drivers are being lost right now. I know folks within the taxi industry and the airport limousine industry, which are both being devastated by COVID-19. We're not seeing supports for them in this budget. Once again, the Conservative government is leaving behind taxi drivers and limousine drivers and airport limousine drivers in their budget. The Conservative government is choosing to leave behind taxi drivers and airport limousine drivers, who need support right now. We should all be standing up to support them and give them the assistance they need, because they're struggling, and not just in terms of their health; they're struggling financially at this time. At a moment when the Conservative government could show leadership and

support this industry, they have left them behind to fend on their own. They're not giving them the help that they need.

When we look at other areas in which folks are being left behind in this budget—let's look at auto insurance. Auto insurance is an issue that, quite frankly, is for some folks in Brampton one of the most devastating economic issues they have to deal with monthly and yearly. It's such a huge issue. There are folks in Brampton who pay more for their car insurance than for the mortgage on their own home. Because of the underfunding in Brampton, because Brampton doesn't get the investment that we require in transit—we don't get the investment we require in public transit; we don't get the investment we require to ensure we can move people via other means aside from just the car—if you want to get around to where you need to go in Brampton, a car is incredibly necessary, especially if you look at situations in which people have to go to work or go to school and all these factors. In households, because of the lack of investment in public transportation, cars become something that folks rely on.

This Conservative government doesn't have a single mention of car insurance in this budget.

Let's look at the Conservative track record on car insurance. I put forward a bill that over 30 lawyers read and compared to the Conservative government's private member's bill about car insurance. They looked at both pieces of legislation and said my bill would actually reduce car insurance rates by prohibiting postal code discrimination. They then looked at the Conservative member's bill and said it would not have the same kind of ability to address the issue that my bill would. They voted down my bill. They voted yes to their bill. Lo and behold, three years later, nothing has happened to car insurance.

Now, under a pandemic, when I drive on different highways, when we see very clearly on billboards or on the announcement boards on the highway, "Stay at home"—folks have been doing the right thing. They've been staying home. When they stay home, their cars have been parked in their driveway; their cars have been parked on the road. Instead of giving them relief, this Conservative government has actually approved increases to their car insurance. Let me say this very clearly for the viewers at home: Any time your car insurance goes up, it's because the Conservative government approves an insurance company and allows them to increase your rates. At the same time that the Conservative government is telling you to stay at home to stop the spread of COVID-19—rightly so; we should all stay at home—the Conservative government should be providing relief to Ontarian drivers by way of relief in car insurance premiums.

Instead, we've seen complete neglect from this government, so much so that they've walked us into the third lockdown. The Conservative government has walked us into this third lockdown because they refused to invest in the help that people need, frankly, to fight COVID-19. They refused to invest in paid sick days. They refused to invest in adequately funding our health care system. They refused to bring in an equitable rollout plan for vaccines.

The Conservative government keeps on saying, “We’re going to divert,” any time we ask about vaccines. Well, let’s look at the Conservative track record: 325 pharmacies were given vaccines to roll out across Ontario. Not one was located in Peel, a hot spot. Those are the facts and figures that I’m quoting to the government. I know that things have changed since then, but look at your track record. Your track record is, in itself, not even equal. It’s unequal. You’re actually giving a community that, at a bare minimum—if they at least were given equal, it would allow them some ability to combat the devastating impact of COVID-19. On your own record, you left Peel out of a project that would have helped fight the COVID-19 pandemic by ensuring that pharmacies had vaccines to give towards communities that are living in hot spots. Instead, we saw nothing from this Conservative government.

1540

I also want to spend time talking about small businesses. When I hear and I talk about small businesses—it’s something that truly defines the injustice of COVID-19. It truly defines how devastating this pandemic is, because there are businesses that, through no fault of their own, are struggling right now because of COVID-19. These are businesses that were robust, that were doing fantastic before the pandemic, but now, because of the pandemic—not because of their own decisions—they are struggling. Instead of giving these businesses the support they need to survive this unprecedented time, the Conservative government has left them to fend for themselves.

The NDP has been calling for support for small businesses since the beginning of this pandemic. We’ve been calling for rental support, a ban on commercial evictions, a freeze on utility payments. The Conservative government did not bring any of this in. The only thing they brought in was far too little, far too late. And something we’re hearing across the board is that people can’t access the supports that the Conservative government is putting forward. And now, with this most recent lockdown, which this Conservative government walked us right into, it should have come with supports for small business, but they brought in nothing. Instead, we’re seeing their doors close across the province. It is devastating, it is unjust, and it is wrong.

If this Conservative government actually cared about small business, then they would put their money where their mouth is and they would invest in small business. They would give them the economic support they need to survive this unprecedented time. Instead, we’re seeing small businesses struggling at a time when, quite frankly, we should all be providing support. The NDP has been advocating for this. The NDP has been fighting for small businesses to get this kind of support, and it has fallen on deaf ears.

Interjections.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: There are obviously folks upset right now. Every single one of you knows a business in your community that is shutting down right now because

of COVID-19. You had a decision to either invest in them and help them get through these tough times or leave them to fend for themselves, and you chose.

This is a decision that the Conservative government made. They made a decision to let small businesses sink. Instead, what we saw for the past couple of months is them prop up these huge, big-box businesses—give them the red carpet and leave small businesses to fend for themselves, hang them out to dry.

Speaker, I can go on and on about this budget and how it fails people, but I’m going to conclude my comments by saying this: This budget does not do it for Ontarians. It doesn’t do it for people who are struggling now. They deserve better. They deserve more support than what this Conservative government is giving them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Now we have time to begin the process of questions and responses.

I turn to the government House leader for the first question.

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member for Brampton North and the member, himself, for Brampton East highlighted the importance of important infrastructure in his community, whether it be post-secondary institutions or hospitals. I wonder, then, given the importance he places on that, if he would support a ministerial zoning order so that we could proceed quicker with the items he has talked about. And if he’s not in favour of moving quicker through a ministerial zoning order, then would he accept the fact that the timelines are as they would have to be?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: I’m going to ask the House leader to just slow down whenever he asks these questions, because it’s very convoluted—your questions you put forward.

Let me say, very clearly, what Brampton needs. Brampton needs funding immediately for our health care system. We need funding for Brampton Civic, which is currently underfunded; we need money to convert Peel Memorial from a health centre into a hospital; and we need the building of another hospital. The Conservative government had an opportunity to do that in their budget, but instead, they gave folks an empty promise.

That’s what we’re seeing time and again from this Conservative government—empty promises and election promises, when they should have been actually focusing on helping people in a pandemic. The Conservative government made a decision to leave Bramptonians out to dry at a time when they need to help them most.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The government House leader will come to order, please. The member for Sarnia–Lambton come to order, please. We’re almost at the end of this. We’re almost there.

The member for London North Centre has a question.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I’d like to thank the member from Brampton East for his comments. You can easily tell every time he speaks about his close ties and his passion for his community that he has an understanding of his community, as owners of small businesses.

To his comments about creating confusion—it seems as though this government has taken a page from the populist playbook, as though if you repeat something enough times, people will eventually believe it. I'd like to thank the member for going back to the past government and their promises they didn't intend to keep, which they eventually admitted, and then calling them so-called "stretch goals."

My question to the member: Is it an insult to people's intelligence that governments past and present continually write these rubber cheques to Brampton?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: I think the greater insult to Brampton is the fact that in a city of over 600,000 people, there's only one hospital. In a city that is struggling right now with the COVID-19 pandemic—it's exacerbated by the fact that we had a health care crisis before COVID-19. Thousands of people are treated in hallways every year in Brampton—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I'm sorry to interrupt the member from Brampton East. You're in the right place but at the wrong time.

Pursuant to standing order 61(d), I am now required to put the question.

On March 24, 2021, Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved, seconded by Mr. Ford, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government. Is it the pleasure of House that the motion carry? Did I hear a no?

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

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

WORKPLACE SAFETY
AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT
ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE
ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE
LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 24, 2021, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 238, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 238, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: After listening all afternoon, it's good to finally get up and have a few pearls of wisdom here maybe—

Interjections.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: —for some folks. I've got all my admirers here. I appreciate that, Speaker.

Anyway, it's an honour to rise today and speak to the third reading of Bill 238, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, 2021. This is a very important piece of legislation to the businesses in my riding of Sarnia–Lambton. I'm very pleased that this particular bill has made it to this stage of debate. I know the Minister of Labour and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Labour have done a lot of work on this bill with their staff. I'm hopeful that we will see unanimous support for Bill 238 when it comes to a vote. I think it would be important to send a message to the business community in Ontario that all members of this Legislature are united in support of small business, and that we will do everything we can do to help them through the ongoing challenge of the pandemic.

I'd like to reiterate some of the very important comments that we heard from the Minister of Labour and the parliamentary assistant earlier this month.

It goes without saying that this pandemic has had a particularly serious effect on main street businesses and our hard-working employees.

Small businesses, as we know, are the backbone of our economy. It has certainly been a challenging 14 months for businesses and employees in Sarnia–Lambton. Everyone has had to rethink how they run their business to comply with COVID-19 safety requirements and to protect their workers and their customers. I'm really pleased with how everyone has adapted in response to the public health guidance in order to continue to serve their customers.

I think that our government has been very responsive to meeting the needs of businesses over the past 14 months. From the Premier's office to the individual members, everyone has stepped up their game on behalf of the people of Ontario.

1550

Workers and their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic—they've launched a workplace inspection blitz to ensure that employees are protected and that workplaces are following all the COVID-19 public health guidance. I understand that over 46,000 safety inspections have been done in this province—78 businesses shut down over the last year since COVID-19.

This government has invested \$77 million in the Second Career program to help over 2,750 individuals who have been displaced from their jobs by the COVID-19 pandemic or to retrain for in-demand careers. And they launched the Ontario government's new, two-year \$115-million Skills Development Fund. That fund, which will support workers and apprentices, is specifically designed to address the challenges brought on by COVID-19 and to help reduce obstacles to hiring, training and retaining while preparing workers for the province's economic recovery. This was a very popular announcement in my riding of Sarnia–Lambton. I'm certainly hopeful that some of the applicants from my area will also be able to participate in this program.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Labour, Skills Development and Training has really been taking steps that we

need as a province to respond and move forward during this pandemic. So it comes as no surprise to me that the member would table such an important piece of legislation as Bill 238, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act. It is a straightforward bill—only a few amendments are included in the bill—but it will go a long way in helping to support businesses and their employees in Ontario over the coming months.

For those watching this afternoon who may have missed the previous debates of the bill, let me spend a few minutes explaining what this bill actually does and why it's important.

Bill 238 is described in this way in the explanatory note: "Amendments are made to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.

"New section 88.1 sets out a special rule for the calculation of certain premiums payable by employers for the 2021 calendar year. The Lieutenant Governor in Council is given regulation-making powers with respect to the calculation and the period during which the special rule applies.

"New section 167 provides that the minister may direct the board to provide the minister with information that the minister considers necessary for the proper administration of the act. The board is required to provide the information on or before the date specified by the minister and in the form specified by the minister. The minister may delegate the minister's powers under section 167 to the deputy minister."

In the simplest terms, if passed, Bill 238 will protect employers from unexpected increases in Workplace Safety and Insurance Board premiums due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Just as importantly, it will not affect the annual increase in the maximum earnings cap for workers' benefits. This is a win-win situation for workers and employers.

Mr. Speaker, you might ask, why is this necessary? This legislative change is meant to address on a temporary basis an unexpected rise in the Ontario average industrial wage due to the economic impacts of COVID-19. In most years, the average industrial wage would rise by 2% to 3%. However, in 2020, COVID-19 led to far fewer low-wage workers being employed because of their employment. As a result, the average industrial wage in this one year increased by almost 8%—7.8% to be exact. The effect of this unanticipated rise is that the total premiums payable by some employers would increase in 2021, despite the WSIB board of directors' decision to freeze premium rates in 2021 at the 2020 levels. Assuming that the average industrial wage returns to its expected year-over-year change, the way Bill 238 is drafted means that the WSIB would revert to the existing wording in section 88 on a go-forward basis to establish the maximum insurable earnings ceiling.

Let me step back for a moment to unpack this a little bit. A perfect example of what is happening here took place in my own riding of Sarnia-Lambton. Fifteen months ago, our local economy was doing very well. As the home of Ontario's petrochemical and biorefining hub,

we were in the middle of several critically important construction projects, representing billions of dollars of economic investment—\$2 billion alone at the Nova Chemicals project. The province of Ontario has \$100 million of its own money in that investment to trigger that \$2-billion investment. I'll just say I worked with the former government at that time to bring that money to fruition. Many new stores were opening across Sarnia-Lambton, and many existing businesses and services, like bars and restaurants, were benefiting from the ripple effect of these major investments. Then the pandemic hit, and unfortunately, it has been necessary for many businesses to operate with public health restrictions or to remain closed to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

Essential work, like the work taking place in Sarnia-Lambton's Chemical Valley, was able to continue in order to deliver these critical projects for the people of Ontario—and thank you to the Minister of Labour and Training for that. This work was being performed in many cases by higher-wage employees—and this wasn't just happening in Sarnia-Lambton, but across the province in many other jurisdictions.

As a result of this temporary pause in the number of low-wage workers being factored into the annual industrial wage increase, the WSIB and the Ministry of Labour observed an increase in its annual calculation that far outpaced what is expected in a normal year. As I mentioned, in most years, employers would expect to see a 2% to 3% increase in their premiums. Instead, that increase calculated for 2021 would be almost 8%. This increase in the average wage would lead to higher insurance costs for those employers who have workers at or above the earnings cap.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit workers making lower wages the hardest. Many of them, including a high percentage of youth, have their lost jobs in sectors such as retail, hospitality and service. In comparison, far more higher-wage earners, like those in the construction sector, retained employment during this difficult time. This has resulted in a spike in the average industrial wage of Ontario workers, because so many lower-wage jobs aren't in the workforce temporarily during this time.

An unintended consequence of this spike would have been significant increases to Workplace Safety and Insurance Board premiums for many of these employers across Ontario as well as in Sarnia-Lambton. That's because those premiums are capped on a formula using Ontario's average industrial wage, the AIW. The premium payment is based on a cap of 175% of the average industrial wage for each worker on the employer's payroll. This calculation is intended to insulate employers from excessive premium payments for high-earning workers. The cap is set out in the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act and is calculated by the WSIB based on this average industrial wage.

Speaker, Bill 238 is another example of how our government is responding to the avalanche of new challenges that have popped up during this global pandemic. Passing Bill 238 will make a significant difference for employers,

not only in my riding but in yours and many other ridings across this province. That will help them with their bottom line. It will also help them retain jobs. That is so important right now, as we work to recover from the pandemic.

As the Premier has mentioned many times, everything is on the table. Bill 238 is just the latest initiative aimed at helping employers through this difficult time. Last year, the WSIB deferred premium payments for employers between March and August 2020. This gave employers in small and large businesses almost \$2 billion in relief from premium payments and saved the average business \$1,760.

On top of this deferral, WSIB premiums have been reduced by over \$2 billion since 2018, since this government took office. When introducing a new rate framework in 2019, the WSIB cut premium rates for approximately three quarters of the employers who paid them.

To further assist non-profits, the WSIB froze their premium rates for five years. This is direct help for Legions, women's shelters, daycares, YMCAs, soup kitchens, art galleries, churches, addiction and recovery centres, theatres, nursery schools, food banks, hospices, retirement homes, children's aid societies, animal shelters, charities, museums, rape crisis centres and many other non-profits.

Again, our government is doing everything it can to support workers and aid businesses through this difficult time. These proposed changes will provide much-needed relief for businesses just trying to survive this global pandemic.

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The Minister of Labour has also considered what changes proposed in Bill 238 will mean for businesses in the future. Some business owners might be worried that Bill 238 will create greater financial burdens for them in the future, that future employer premiums will be impacted by this proposed legislation. The answer to that concern is that the near-term increase will be paid out of the WSIB insurance fund.

The WSIB currently has more than enough funds to cover the cost of current and future benefits to injured workers. At the end of June 2020, the WSIB reported a sufficiency ratio of 115.4% over and above what they would need to pay all of the people owing. It's important to note that the proposed legislation is a temporary premium relief measure for 2021 only, with a possible extension by regulation until December 2022 at the very latest.

Finally, I want to stress the most important of all these changes. Bill 238 will not impact any injured worker's entitlement to benefits or services. The WSIB fund is healthy, and any additional costs associated with these temporary changes will be absorbed by the WSIB. That really is terrific news, and as a government we are hearing a lot of really positive reactions to the changes in Bill 238.

Richard Lyall, president of the Residential Construction Council of Ontario, said, "We're pleased to see Minister McNaughton taking action on behalf of businesses impacted by COVID-19, protecting employers

from excessive premiums, while ensuring benefit payments for workers will not be impacted."

Giovanni Cautillo, president of the Ontario General Contractors Association, responded to the introduction of Bill 238 by saying, "Ontario's industrial, commercial and institutional general contractors commend the legislation proposed by" the minister. "This will mean workers remain supported, and employers can continue building the critical infrastructure needed for Ontario's economic recovery. This legislation adds to the significant steps taken by the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development to support the WSIB system."

David Frame, chair of the Construction Employers Coalition for WSIB and health and safety and prevention, remarked, "This legislative change will avoid an unforeseen pandemic-related issue from significantly impacting high-wage employers across the economy. These industries are essential to Ontario's economic recovery. The government's proposal will provide injured workers with a benefit ceiling increase while protecting employers from unreasonable costs.

"It's clear that Minister McNaughton is committed to listening to employers and making the institutions aimed to support them more effective."

Those individuals represent some very important employers in our province. They clearly appreciate the work that the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development is doing.

I thought maybe he wrote this. It says here: "They also have a very high opinion of the minister." Who could disagree with that?

Interjections.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I just want to read two more quotes about the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

First, Giovanni Cautillo, president of the Ontario General Contractors Association—I should have read this first, before I got up here. He said about the Ministry of Labour: "Overall, from the industry's standpoint, we are very happy that the government has been responsive on this matter. Clearly under the minister's leadership, they stepped up for the contractors."

And finally, from Andrew Pariser, vice-president of the Residential Construction Council of Ontario: "Minister McNaughton and the Ford government are clearly showing contractors, employers and businesses that they are priorities and they believe we are going to lead the recovery."

Mr. Speaker, I couldn't agree more. I couldn't have said it any better myself. I think because of the way our government has responded to the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, the way Team Ontario was pulled together, we are poised to lead a strong recovery in the months ahead. Bill 238, if passed, is another important step in supporting businesses as we rebuild the momentum of the economic recovery.

The WSIB is a big, important part of ensuring safe workplaces in Ontario. Seriously, over five million workers are covered by the WSIB insurance program, at

more than 300,000 workplaces across this great province. Our government is taking action to support those workers and workplaces through Bill 238. Our government is also continuing to support businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we have reduced WSIB premiums by over \$2 billion.

With Bill 238, we are limiting the impact of an unexpected rise in the average industrial wage which would have had an impact on premiums of over 2%. This action will help employers remain solvent, and instead of the WSIB having a large surplus, businesses can now invest in new jobs, technology and health and safety programs. The WSIB benefit payments for workers will not be impacted, I'd like to add again.

As members of this Legislature, we have a responsibility to help businesses in our communities get through these challenging times. We need to come together to support small businesses, to help lift some of the burden on them so they can survive, rebuild and push forward to a bright future.

I encourage all members of this House to support Bill 238 in third reading. Let's send a strong message to our small businesses that we are doing everything we can to support them.

With that, Mr. Speaker, thank you, and I'll sit down now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Well, if the members of the opposition have prepared their questions as well as the member for Sarnia–Lambton has prepared his presentation, we're in for an interesting 10 minutes.

I turn to the member from Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: There's a great movie out there called *Anchorman*, and I think that my colleague the member from Sarnia–Lambton embodies the character Ron Burgundy, because he will read whatever is put in front of him. I think we could surreptitiously remove his PC Party speech and put an NDP one in front of him and he wouldn't know the difference, to tell you the truth, Speaker.

I know that the member cares about working people. I know that he comes from a town similar to mine, in Windsor and Essex county, and to Hamilton. I respect the member because I know he has stood up for working-class people in his career. But he and I would differ on the differences around their actions around WSIB and what we've promoted as New Democrats.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pose your question, please.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is: How, in good conscience, can the member promote reducing contributions to the WSIB—

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

I would ask the member from Sarnia–Lambton to respond to the question that almost got delivered.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the member for Essex. He and I do share a similar background, somewhere in construction, and I know he worked in industry long

before he came here, like I did, and had a good chance to spend some time there.

As I read in the remarks there, the workers will be protected, because there will be no reduction in the payments to injured workers. The premium increase that would ordinarily be taken will be taken out of that surplus, which is over 115% of what would be needed if they had to pay out all the claims tomorrow. I feel quite confident that this is a great move by the Minister of Labour, as I said in my remarks numerous times. I think that this will work out fine.

Mr. Mike Harris: I have a very simple question to the member opposite, and I promise that I'll be able to get mine out in a timely manner.

I was hoping that the member from Sarnia–Lambton might be able to tell us a little bit more about the supportive quotes that he read in the Legislature today and how industry is really rallying around what we're trying to do here with this bill.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Yes, I read a number of quotes, and I won't read them again, from industry—

Interjection.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: —get on the record that they appreciated the work of the WSIB and, of course, the minister with his guidance and oversight, and what they were trying to do for the small business sector, who are going to bounce back when we come out of this into the recovery. Of course, the businesses that were able to carry on wouldn't be inadvertently affected by a premium increase—a premium increase through no fault of their own. A number of those quotes, which I won't read again, because I got them on the record—a number of those businesses spoke out in favour of that premium freeze and the method going forward.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Mushkegowuk–James Bay.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Merci, monsieur le Président. Je vais attendre qu'il mette son appareil. Ma question—puis je remercie le député de Sarnia–Lambton. Dans son allocution, il parlait d'aider les entreprises à aider les entreprises. Mais dans ce projet-là, 238, ce qu'on peut voir c'est qu'on aide les grosses entreprises. On n'aide pas les petites et les moyennes entreprises, parce que dans ce projet de loi, on parle de 97 308 \$ en salaire. Je ne connais pas, moi, de petites entreprises qui payent leurs employés 97 308 \$.

Alors, ma question, ce que j'aimerais entendre le député répondre c'est : comment explique-t-il que dans son projet de loi il parle d'aider les entreprises, mais qu'il laisse tomber les petites entreprises?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the member for that question. No, I don't think it is leaving aside small business. These businesses, when they do start up, their premiums will be the same. This is helping the larger businesses that were able to stay employed—thank God—

during this COVID-19 pandemic. They were able to stay employed, keeping their workers employed, who were at a much higher wage, for them. And of course, that would have impacted their businesses and their owners and the employees. If the business doesn't have a job and doesn't have a business to operate, then those employees that are earning that higher wage wouldn't have a job.

We need stability in the industry, we need stability in the premiums, and this is what this will bring to small businesses.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you very much to the member for that presentation. Of course, the member has spent a great deal of time working in the sectors that are impacted by this legislation and has given, as well, post his private-sector life, a great deal of time to ensuring that the people of Sarnia–Lambton are taken care of. I would like to also acknowledge that the member has passed four private member's bills, which I believe is close to a record for this chamber—quite impressive—and is always working to protect workers in the province of Ontario.

I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit about the importance of WSIB and why this stability will ensure that there's WSIB for years and decades and generations to come.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): How many private member's bills? Back to the member from Sarnia–Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the member from Niagara. I wouldn't ordinarily bring it up, but the Speaker did ask. I think it's maybe eight private member's bills.

Interjections.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you. I wouldn't have brought it up, but the Speaker did ask, so I did have to get that on the record. Yes, and they were all consequential, I like to say; the majority of them. All of them were consequential to workers. Ontario One Call, "Call before you dig"—of course, everyone knows that one. Then the other one I'm very proud of, the food tax credit for farmers and also for the food banks—many others. I'll think of them now. I can't remember them all. But anyway, they were all very consequential in the impact on labour and the private sector and on people that were hard done by. That was my very first one actually. My second one—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): You don't have to answer anymore, because you're out of time. Thank you.

The member for Scarborough Southwest has a question.

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member for his speech. It was very inspiring. I heard him speak passionately about workers' safety.

Last week, my colleague from Hamilton Mountain brought a bill amending the WSIB to include mental health support for workers. I know the member from Sarnia–Lambton cares about workers and their mental health, especially at this time right now. So my question is, why did they vote against it in that case? Did we not research enough to give you guys a much more passionate speech?

How else could we have logically persuaded you to vote for this? Because you seem to care about it—then why didn't the action show?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the member for that question. I would like to point out that during this pandemic, the ministry has conducted over 46,000 workplace inspections. I know they've added another 100-plus labour inspectors, which puts them at over 500 to date, if I remember right. Seventy workplaces over the last year have actually been shut down because they were not obeying the proper COVID-19—

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Protocols.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Protocols—that's the word, "protocols." We never used that a lot in the shop where I worked.

I think mental health is important. As our Minister Tibollo has said many times, you can't have a good economy if you don't have mental health and healthy workers. This government believes in that as well, and I know the Minister of Labour does as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Our protocol is to ask for one more question. I turn to the government House leader, who's going to pose it.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate that the member talked about the member from Hamilton Mountain's bill. It really, frankly, just did not go far enough and just wasn't a good bill when it comes to mental health and the supports that the government is putting in.

I know the member was probably reeling the way I was, hearing the answer from the member for Brampton East. When asked specifically if he would like to speed up infrastructure development in his riding by having MZO's, the member said no. I was shocked at that. And then, of course, we know that because he voted against it earlier today as well.

One thing that struck me, and I know he would maybe spend some time with, is if he could really highlight some more of the great things that the Minister of Labour has accomplished in his time in that role. He's spent a lot of time on that, and I wonder if he could juxtapose that with the work that's in this bill as well.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I will expound. I've got a few seconds there. I know the Minister of Labour has worked very hard in this province. He has worked with industry, small business and large industry. He headed up infrastructure before he became Minister of Labour, so he's got a real hands-on background. He worked in the small business sector long before he came here, in the hardware sector, where he learned at his father's knee. He worked through the store, worked with customers, worked with small business. He understands the impact of small business on the economy and is doing a great job here in the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We don't have time for further questions.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Ms. Doly Begum: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I'm sorry. Point of order: the member for Scarborough Southwest.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to correct my record. On March 31, in my question, I mentioned that the amount of vaccine given to the health network was reduced by 23%. It's actually a 77% decrease of vaccine allocation. And earlier in my response during the budget debate, I mentioned the postal code M1K. It's actually postal code M1N that's been left out. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member does have the right to correct her record.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I'm sorry, I thought you were going to correct your record. My hearing through the mask is a problem.

WORKPLACE SAFETY
AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT
ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE
ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE
LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a strange day to be joining this debate on Bill 238, which is the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act. It's a tough act to follow from Sarnia–Lambton over there.

I want to say, though, the Premier of the province just announced that schools are not going to be opening after this April break. It's a very strange thing, because just yesterday they were insisting that schools were safe across this province. The reason I'm raising this is that, within the context of how legislation comes to the floor of this House from a priorities perspective, it's quite interesting, actually.

The Premier was asked by the media's Laura Stone—he was basically asked the question that I think all of us really want to know: How did you come up with this decision? Have you fully given it some consideration? And what is the data and the evidence to rationalize the decision? Because—listen, my colleague from Kitchener–Conestoga: five kids at home. Those kids are not going back to school. Parents are going to be understandably upset and scrambling for assistance. Nobody wants to be here.

But the Premier says, “It's never the Premier or Doug Ford sitting in a corner making a decision,” Premier @fordnation says of himself, adding there are hundreds of people who weigh in.”

Well, Mr. Speaker, there were many people weighing in for months now on what needed to happen to keep schools safe, to keep teachers safe, to keep early childhood educators safe: Improve ventilation in our schools—HVAC systems. We heard this over the course of the

summer—the summer, Mr. Speaker, June, July, August and September—when people came to us and said, “Listen, we want to be part of the solution. We want to keep our schools safe. We don't want to have educators having to fight with WSIB for mental health supports or occupational health concerns. We want to be part of the solution.”

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Those companies from across the province came to this government in late spring, early summer, and said, “Let's create jobs in Ontario, but let's also make schools safe by improving the air quality in these workplaces.” Did the government listen? They did not.

We had the shutdown last March. We had the shutdown just in early winter, in January and February. And we are in our third lockdown: again, a stay-at-home order, a state of emergency, where businesses, that you claim you're trying to help with this piece of legislation by giving them a break on the WSIB premiums—those businesses are not going to be in business to benefit from a piece of legislation like this. They are so far out of luck, they are out of rope, and they told you that this was going to happen to them.

Mr. Speaker, over 4,000 cases of COVID-19, and 15 more Ontarians died last night. We are still having this entrenched resistance to paid sick days under the Employment Standards Act—which is your job. It is your job as a province to do that, as a government, to make sure that workers are safe in the province of Ontario. It is not the federal government's job, full stop.

Mr. Speaker, the debate on paid sick days, not only should it be over and not only should those days be instated—because we actually brought Bill 239 by my colleague from London West to the floor of this Legislature, an excellent bill that was vetted by almost every major organization in the province of Ontario, fully recognizing that without a healthy population, our economy cannot stay open; our schools cannot stay open. We brought that to you, and you would have had licence, you would have had agency to follow through on that during a pandemic, because everybody wanted to avoid this third lockdown. Everyone wanted to avoid it.

There are parents right now who are just trying to hold on to their sanity in the province of Ontario, and they're reaching out to our offices en masse right now. So having a Premier talk about himself in the third person, that he's not in a corner making these decisions by himself—the people of this province ask a very good question: Who is he listening to? Because it's not his own science table, who recommended that a made-in-Ontario paid sick day program be brought to keep workers safe, to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19. It certainly isn't the medical officers of health from Peel, from Mississauga, from Peterborough, from Waterloo region, when they said, “Listen, we have this race-based data. We need you to apply that knowledge in a strategic way and invest in keeping communities safe so that our workers don't become ill.” He's not listening to those folks, Mr. Speaker.

Strangely enough, on the big-box issue, for the last two lockdowns, this Premier seemed to be listening to the CEO

of Walmart, but for some reason, in the third one, now he understands that businesses are just hanging on. One in six businesses in the province of Ontario is closing. They have, on average, \$170,000 worth of debt—and then they get shut down again.

If I'd been able to get to my question this morning, I was going to talk about the restaurant Antler. Do you remember Antler? An excellent Toronto restaurant. They were told two weeks ago, "You're going to be opening." They never buy draught beer, because you can't sell that curbside, and they've been doing everything to stay open. They got two kegs of draught beer in and all this excitement because the Premier was still saying, two days—two days—before he shut this province down, "Yes, we're going to have it." Today should be the day that people can get a haircut. Some of us really need a haircut; I'm not going to point any fingers.

So there's this inconsistency in how decisions are being made across this province that undermines confidence, and, almost more importantly, it undermines compliance. When you have 2,000 people in Dundas Square without masks on because they have just—there's no credibility whatsoever with how decisions are being made.

So this government has brought Bill 238 to the floor of the Legislature. They say that this is going to give businesses a break on WSIB premiums. Do you know what businesses want? Businesses want the small business grant that they applied for to actually come into the bank. They want the eligibility for the small business grant to actually come to fruition. What more do they have to do? What more do they have to say to this government to have this government actually bring in a piece of legislation that is going to make a difference to them, to their families, is going to hold the creditors at bay, the supply chain where they can't pay their bills? There's a huge trickle-out effect to the economy when the Premier of this province says one thing on one day and then almost the very next day reverses that decision and then also begs off responsibility for it and says, "Listen, it's not just me. I've got all these other hundreds of people telling me what to do." This is not leadership. It is certainly not the kind of leadership that you would need in the province of Ontario during a pandemic.

We are doing, I think, the worst on vaccines, despite what the Premier has said. What he said this weekend and what we heard this morning in question period was, "We're doing pretty well." This floored Ontarians. And the Minister of Health says, "You know, that was about vaccines." Well, that still demonstrates a huge disconnect from what people are experiencing in Ontario. My parents in Peterborough have had to wait months in order to get a vaccine, and they shouldn't have to go into a Walmart to get it. I don't think so, Mr. Speaker.

When you compare how the vaccine rollout is happening by postal code—and my colleague from Essex raised this this morning in question period. When CBC did their review and did their analysis about where the vaccines are going and where they're not going, this calls into question the entire methodology of how this government

is lurching from one poor decision to another poor decision, and these decisions are having such a negative and painful impact on the people that we serve. But why in that analysis did they find that there were four out of five ridings that didn't qualify for that priority vaccine access? They did not qualify. By the government's own criteria, they should not be getting vaccine priority, but they are. The CBC did their analysis: They found that those ridings were held by PC members. That compromises all confidence. It undermines, from an ethical perspective, how vaccines are being distributed, who's getting the contracts for those vaccine distributions and how this government is making these decisions. When the Premier draws this picture of hundreds of people whispering in his ear—and who has his attention? Who actually has the Premier's ear?—it does undermine the confidence that really all Ontarians will even have on what we're doing here.

The piece of legislation that is on the floor right now rings hollow in many respects. I watched the debate from our last week here, and my colleague from Hamilton Mountain brought forward the Access to Mental Health Support for Essential Workers. The stories that were told by my colleagues that day in support of that private member's bill—which would offer presumptive support for our essential front-line workers, those heroes that you talk about who show up and do the hardest job in the world. My friend from Niagara was mentioning that one PSW had a floor of almost 100 residents, and because people were getting sick, she was on her own, and they had three deaths that night. That woman who served the public, who did her best, I think she said, "There were no good decisions that could happen in that context." How does one person take care of that many residents? How does it speak to how we value seniors in Ontario? That's the lowest bar right there, to leave one poor woman in charge in a crisis where three people are dying on that shift, and she just doesn't want them to die alone. She has PTSD. She's trying to navigate this messy WSIB system, and the government is not focused on helping that woman, that front-line hero, that essential worker. They're very focused, though, on reducing premiums further. So it does speak to priorities about where we are right now in Ontario and how those decisions are getting made.

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One of the lowest parts when I was watching was when a member from Mississauga, I believe it was, said, "Well, we can't afford to do that." Can you imagine standing in your place, and out one side of your mouth you're saying that these people are amazing; they're holding the province together; they're caring; they're heroes. But on the other side, you say, "But we can't afford to give you the mental health supports that we know you need and that we're actually complicit in because we underfunded the system so greatly that we left one woman in charge of almost 100 residents." Forty-one PC members voted against providing presumptive mental health supports for essential workers. That does matter to people. I want to tell you that that does matter and that resonates.

The mishandling of the education file, as I've just mentioned—the WSIB claims that have gone into WSIB on the education front have been so frustrating for educators. Custodians aren't prioritized at all, but they're tasked with keeping these schools safe. I think the funding formula that was finally determined offered 1.5 additional staff members per school in the province of Ontario. Schools were still struggling to get PPE and all the products to try to keep our schools safe. As I said, the most important thing that was never brought into place was a structural capital investment for ventilation. And the classes were never reduced. My husband teaches in the secondary panel in Waterloo, out in Waterloo-Oxford. There are 28 kids in that class. So how can the government rationalize these kinds of decisions that you have been making, knowing that you have evidence right before you?

I think the powerful thing that the government could have done in the early days was to bring in a paid sick day model. The evidence was very clear, plus it was cost-efficient, because the government will say that this is double dipping from the federal and provincial governments. At the same time, they brag about the fact that the federal program has \$600 million or \$800 million in it. It is undersubscribed because it doesn't work. If you are living paycheque to paycheque, you can't afford to navigate that federal system, take that time, and then you'll only get reimbursed if you in fact have COVID-19. So you lose money, which means you can't pay your rent, which means you can't pay your bills, which means you can't buy food. That's what's at stake here. When the government's own science table recommends it, and the government of the day and the Premier of the day choose to not listen, it really leaves us at a deficit position, which is where we are right now in Ontario.

Dr. Warner last week, when we saw specifically where the infections were happening, where the workplace outbreaks were happening, shared a stat that said—because our ICUs are over 600 now. Patients from Toronto are now at Grand River and St. Mary's hospital in Waterloo, and so now we're almost full in our ICUs in Waterloo. It costs \$3,592 a day for an ICU bed, and that's a staffed bed. This government talks about beds that they've created, but you know what? They're actually not operationalized because they don't have nurses. So just offering a bed is actually not the solution in the long run. Versus \$114 a day for paid sick days: \$3,592 for an ICU bed versus \$114 a day for paid sick days. I don't know, Mr. Speaker; for us it would be worth it on a moral and ethical basis, but also there's clearly an economic case here for keeping people healthy, allowing people to stay home when they actually are sick and having the Employment Standards Act acknowledge that sick days are important health policy and economic policy, which should have already happened now that we are almost 14 months into a pandemic.

The question of priorities for this government stands today. Just whenever we think that it can't get any worse, you put parents and students through the wringer.

I have to tell you, I met with CAMH—like many people, we still had meetings last week even though we

weren't here in the Legislature. CAMH used to say one in five are suffering from mental health issues. That stat as of last week is that four out of five have mental health issues.

You can't acknowledge in one sentence how safe schools are and how important they are to keep open one day, literally yesterday, and then close those schools today. That inconsistency, and the application of a broad health care policy, which has gaps in evidence and gaps in rationale, fails to follow through on making sure that from a workplace safety perspective people actually are safe in the province of Ontario.

What businesses have been looking for from this government is clarity, which is why Antler sent Doug Ford the bill for those beers. They want to make sure that the rules of engagement are open and transparent and that they understand what evidence the government is using to make those decisions. They need direct financial support. The government will say they doubled down in this last budget for those existing businesses that closed last week. It took them a whole year to do something for tourism. But they left out a whole swath of businesses and basically just said, "You know what? You're on your own."

What we know for sure, Mr. Speaker, is that we can do so much better for the people of this province.

I'm sure it's difficult for some of these Conservative members that we've served with for a long time, because I know that what I heard last week and the level of frustration around the competency or lack thereof of this government in how you've handled the pandemic is indisputable. The message box and the spinning isn't going to get you out of this. What you need is tangible solutions to keep people safe so that we can keep the economy open.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Your first question goes to the member from Haldimand-Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I've enjoyed the debate this afternoon with respect to this proposed legislation, Bill 238. What we're hearing this afternoon is it's a win for employers; it's a win for employees.

Just leading up to my question to the member from Waterloo: You made mention of safety. I think of Kitchener-Waterloo and the Cambridge area as an industrial powerhouse, and it has been for many, many years. I used to consult there through the IAPA, the Industrial Accident Prevention Association, which has morphed into WSIB. I guess I'd just like to provide the member with an opportunity to explain. I hope you're not going to vote against this, given the importance—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Ten seconds for your question.

Mr. Toby Barrett: What reasons would you have to vote against a bill like this?

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: I did give the member some rationale for pieces of legislation that you should be passing and that you have not chosen to pass. Bill 239, I mentioned, is the paid sick leave bill; also, Bill 191, which was put forward by my colleague from Niagara Falls, which would legislate presumptive coverage for essential

workers who receive a positive diagnosis of COVID-19. So if a worker of an essential business receives a positive test for COVID-19, the disease is presumed to be an occupational disease. My colleague from Kitchener–Conestoga and I had to deal with this in our ridings because paramedics who were contracting COVID-19 on the job were actually denied at first for WSIB. So I would put that as a huge priority to make sure that our essential front-line workers, who are doing the very work that we've asked them to do, can get WSIB coverage.

1640

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Waterloo for her comments and for bringing up the current situation and the movement from in-person learning to remote learning.

We know that the Premier has walked Ontario back into this wave. The official opposition has been producing some proactive solutions, such as smaller, safer classes, and ventilation. Yet just today in the media, Ford was quoted as saying, "The problem is not in our schools; it is in our community." Lecce also doubles down and goes on to blame community transfer. What they both fail to recognize is that schools themselves are actually a community. They not only share a space, but they share a community identity.

In light of having a letter from the Minister of Education just yesterday and now this new announcement, why do they keep contradicting themselves?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much for the question. It's a valid question. Explaining what happens in the Premier's office is like trying to find the black box these days, because the most consistent thing about what happens in the Premier's office is that they are inconsistent, is what I would say.

Even just last week, actually, this debate about droplets and the disease transmitting by aerosol—the Ministry of Education was having some inspections done because people were filing WSIB claims that said that their workplace, being their schools, felt unsafe. The protocol in place is still now around surfaces, not on aerosol, Mr. Speaker. So the entire system has dropped the ball on making sure that all workplaces are safe, but especially our schools.

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

Hon. Bill Walker: The member from Waterloo said a number of things in her talk. We served, as she said, in opposition, on the same side for a long time. She made a really important comment about undermining confidence. So I'd like to ask her how her and her colleagues, every day in here, impugning Dr. Williams and the medical health table, every day challenging them—they try to go through the Premier and say it's him, but every single decision has been made with the advice and the recommendations of the medical officer of health and the health table. So I wonder how she determines that that's not undermining confidence in the greater public.

The other one is the school closures. We are reacting as quickly as we possibly can. These variants are moving at a very rapid pace. We have 99% of the students not ever have COVID, and we kept that the safest. But now, because of community infection, again, Dr. Williams is recommending that they be closed to prevent more. Can she actually answer why she has to impugn these people continually?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Well, I would say that we're not impugning motive; we are stating facts. In fact, we're often quoting the medical officers, including the one time when John Michael McGrath from TVO reported back to Dr. Brown, who's on the science table, and said, "Dr. Brown, you've just outlined what looks like is going to be a disaster for the province of Ontario, with schools having to close down, ICUs being at their capacity and record numbers of COVID-19." Dr. Brown from the health science table said, "You're right. You're not misinterpreting that." That was February 11. I mean, the fact—

Mr. Robert Bailey: We need more vaccines.

Ms. Catherine Fife: No. You actually need to keep people safer, and what this government has done again and again is not listen to your own science table.

My question back to you is, why aren't you listening to the very people who have the expertise to keep this province safe and to keep it open?

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Speaker. I'll be quick. To the member from Waterloo: Why does the member from Waterloo think that the government voted this afternoon against the private member's bill from the member from Hamilton Mountain that would have brought forward presumptive legislation for PTSD for essential workers?

A two-part question—the second question: Although not a scientific dataset, currently what is trending on Twitter is: "Fire Lecce," and "Ford failed Ontario." Why do you think that's trending on Twitter at this very moment?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you to the member from Essex. I did read my comments prior to standing up here, so I will say that the reason the 41 members voted against Bill 267, my friend and colleague's bill that actually is so needed in the province of Ontario, is that—I think it goes back to what the member from Mississauga said during the debate: It will cost too much money. That is a betrayal of our responsibility as legislators.

This has been the problem with your government the entire time. You've chosen not to invest strategically in keeping people safe, and then we end up paying the price for your incompetence. That essentially is why "Fire Lecce," and "Ford failed Ontario" are trending in the province of Ontario.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: I think that we've had an interesting afternoon here in the Ontario Legislature, and I'm going to liven it up with another 20 minutes of riveting

entertainment on the WSI Act very shortly. But in the little bit of time that we have left—

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Harris: Ah, the member from Sarnia–Lambton wants to let me use his remarks. It could be interesting. I’ve heard them, but I haven’t read them, so I don’t know how it’s going to work out.

To the member from Waterloo, again, the question has been asked a couple of times: Why wouldn’t you support this bill that is going to help small business? Taking all the other stuff aside that she talked about answering the question before, I’d like to hear, and I know the people in Waterloo region would love to hear, why she won’t support this particular bill.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Well, I could go for another 20 minutes on why this particular piece of legislation actually isn’t going to keep workers safe. I mean, we are in a pandemic. The disconnect that your government has demonstrated with regard to what’s actually happening outside of this Pink Palace is astounding.

The Liberals used to brag about overachieving when they were really failing. You guys can adopt this now. You can say that you’re overachieving: yes, three lockdowns. One in five women has lost their job in the province of Ontario. You brought forward a budget that doesn’t address the need to reintegrate women back into the economy, and we will not recover as a province without women as part of that solution.

I would say, on the issue of priorities, this government has missed the mark on almost every single occasion. The fact that we are here today debating, really, just a small break in premiums for employers versus what is actually happening to employees demonstrates that you are completely and utterly out of touch.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We don’t have enough time for another question and response, so we go to further debate. It’s been foreshadowed by the member from Kitchener–Conestoga that he is up next.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said, I’ll try to make sure that we keep things succinct but entertaining. We’ll see what happens.

Of course, it is an honour to rise and debate here in this chamber again today yet another important piece of legislation our government has brought forward to support the people of Ontario during this difficult time. This bill, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act, will enable the government to provide further relief to employers by limiting unexpected increases to WSIB premiums.

Last year, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board announced that the premium rates would be frozen at their current levels. But what we didn’t expect then was that the average industrial rate would become more than double its usual amount. For employers with workers at or above the earnings cap, this could lead to a huge increase in insurance costs at a time when they are facing immeasurable difficulties.

Usually, the increase in average industrial wages would be about 2% to 3%. That’s what employers have come to expect and that is what they budgeted for when we

announced that premiums would be frozen. However, because workers making lower wages have unfortunately been hit hardest by the pandemic, this year we are seeing an increase of 7.8%.

I would think that the member from Waterloo might want to take note of some of the numbers that are going to come out during my time here debating today, because they are quite staggering. Once she hears them, she might realize that it does make a pretty large impact to small businesses across this province. Maybe the member from Essex will pay attention as well.

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Harris: I can, if you really want me to. We can do it.

As I said, employers pay a premium based on a cap of 175% of the average for each worker on their payroll. Typically, this is meant to insulate the employer from excessive premium payments for higher-earning workers. This is written directly into the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, which is why we’re here today debating these legislative amendments. This is going to make a huge difference for employers, as we heard our Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development explain during his leadoff in this debate. It’s going to keep businesses solvent.

1650

Protecting jobs through legislation like this will have a lasting benefit for families. It is unfortunate that rather than seeing that, the NDP continue to play politics and bring up issues that are totally outside the scope of the bill that we are here debating today. Luckily, the people in this province have a government that is about taking action. That is why we are here to stand behind them, just as we have—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Order, please, the member for Hamilton Mountain.

Mr. Mike Harris: —since the beginning of this pandemic. There isn’t a single business or worker in this province whose life hasn’t been touched by COVID-19. The Premier and our entire government have been forced to make difficult decisions that have impacted the livelihoods of Ontarians across this province—not decisions that we take lightly. But at the end of the day—as I quoted earlier from our Minister of Finance—we cannot have a healthy economy without healthy people.

I want to recognize all of the hard-working business owners who have weathered this year’s uncertainty and new challenges. They are still unsure of what tomorrow will bring, even what the next few months will bring. Yet they’ve been co-operative from day one, because at the root of it, we need to work together to overcome COVID-19 and protect each other. They don’t want to see their staff, their family or their customers get sick. I was a small business owner whose business was impacted severely by measures that were out of my control. I understand the challenges and difficult decisions that they are being forced to make. Working together means that we as a province need to be there for them, too.

Our recent budget proposes to bring our total investment to protect the economy to \$23.3 billion.

The sacrifices made by workers, employers and families to protect us all from COVID-19 have been great—but so has our government's response to support them. I challenge the members opposite to name another time in history when a government has made \$3.4 billion in financial assistance available to businesses in a matter of months. Give me another instance when \$1.8 billion has gone directly to families. We haven't held back and have been quick to get the money out the door without the overly complicated and bureaucratic application processes done by the previous Liberal government.

Small businesses make up 98% of all businesses in the province and contribute roughly 30% to the provincial gross domestic product. They are also the source of a paycheque for three million Ontarians. Three million Ontario households rely on a small business owner to pay their bills.

To support those small business owners, we've launched several direct assistance programs. The Ontario Small Business Support Grant is the most recent one—a minimum of \$10,000 for businesses impacted by health measures that experienced a 20% drop in revenue. At least, it was \$10,000 until the Minister of Finance announced that we were doubling that support. So now anyone eligible for that small business grant will receive a minimum of \$20,000, up to a maximum of \$40,000. Again, that is a \$3.4-billion amount of money that is expected to flow out of just this one program.

Rebates for property taxes and energy costs are also available.

Small business owners have now found themselves on the hook for purchasing masks, sanitizer and Plexiglas barriers. If you had told me when I was running my business that I would need to find these things and source them out, I wouldn't have had any idea where to start, because a year ago, it was only really hospitals and health care facilities that were buying these masks. Now they are a part of our everyday life, as I said before—if they're still watching, thank you, Kim, for making these. To help them cover the costs, we've set up the main street recovery grant. Business owners can submit their receipts and get reimbursed for up to \$1,000 for their PPE purchases. To help source some of these products, we've also set up the workplace PPE directory.

This year, the transition to the digital marketplace has become extremely important, and we've launched the Digital Main Street program. This program includes a grant to set up e-commerce websites and technical support for those who need it. I haven't had an update on these numbers since the beginning of the year, but last I heard, 35 businesses in Waterloo region had benefited from the Digital Main Street program and \$250,000 has flowed into the region of Waterloo alone. That's 35 businesses that were helped to tap into new marketplaces, something that they will benefit from for years to come.

I know that many of the businesses that need this bill are not necessarily the ones receiving these grants, as

businesses that are temporarily reducing their operations are likely not paying all of their staff right now. But ignoring those who have not been subject to the same level of restrictions and forcing them to face huge cost increases is going to be detrimental to our recovery. When we do turn the corner on COVID-19, we are going to need these job creators at the ready to reinvest in their businesses, to create more jobs and stimulate economic growth here in the province of Ontario. Without them, we will be lagging behind. So while our focus is getting help to those who need it today, we also need to start preparing for the future—and that's what this bill does.

Last week, our Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade announced that we created over 180,000 jobs in March. Employment in the province has increased by over one million positions. But we haven't defeated COVID-19 yet, and we have to completely get through this.

The only way to get through this is vaccinations. With over three million vaccines administered, we are well on our way to start looking ahead, to see that light at the end of the tunnel. One way we can do that is by reducing the unnecessary burdens on our job creators now. Legislation like this, as I said, will help us do that. This will simply let businesses pay the same premium rates for WSIB that they did last year—rates that are already remarkably lower than under the previous government.

Since 2018, we have reduced WSIB premiums by over \$2 billion. The elimination of the unfunded liability chargeback in 2019 saved employers nearly 30% on their premium payments. I would say to the member from Waterloo, those are pretty significant numbers.

Before the opposition gets up in arms about these savings decreasing the safety of our workers, let me be clear: Our Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development's top priority is making sure workers go home safely to their families every day. None of these changes that we are discussing today will impact the benefits that workers are receiving.

What this legislative amendment does is it stops the WSIB from running a premium for the next year. I'd like to think we would all be on board with stopping an arm's-length agency of the government from running a surplus when workers and employees are struggling right now. The WSIB has more than enough funds to cover the cost of future and current benefits. So instead of forcing employers to dig into their bank accounts so that surpluses can grow, we're keeping the money they can use in their businesses, where it should be.

Another example of this is our reduction of the business education tax rate. This is a huge win for commercial and industrial property owners in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga. Waterloo region has been paying some of the highest education taxes in the province for over 25 years. That is because the rate was not consistently set across the province. This put our businesses at a disadvantage with those in neighbouring counties.

In November, we announced that we would be stabilizing the business education tax rate across the province at

0.88%. That's a whopping 30% reduction for businesses in my riding and the member from Waterloo's riding. This will save commercial and industrial taxpayers in Waterloo region over \$30 million annually—just in Waterloo region—that can be reinvested into the local economy.

I'm pleased that a government with the will to make these kinds of changes is finally back in the driver's seat of this province.

Across Ontario, this will lead to \$450 million in annual savings for businesses. That's a staggering amount with one small change.

Coupled with our reduction in hydro rates for class A and class B consumers, these measures will outlast COVID-19 and be crucial for our recovery going forward.

I know I've spoken a lot about businesses, and I want to return to the reason why these legislative measures are necessary. It's unfortunately due to the increased job losses amongst those making lower wages. These workers were relying on these jobs to buy groceries and pay their rent, and now they are looking at an uncertain future. But they have not been lost in our government's plan for economic recovery. In fact, retraining and matching job-seekers with in-demand careers has been another focus of our minister. I cannot think of anyone out there who is more passionate about getting people into the skilled trades.

1700

For too long, young people who have natural talent on the shop floor have been pushed into university lecture halls. The stigma that comes with careers in the trades is not something that is going to go away overnight, but it is something our government is committed to fighting against. These are good-paying jobs and exciting career paths that are in demand right now in our province, and we should be promoting these opportunities and not dissuading anyone from exploring them.

As many of you will know, I have a younger daughter, and I hope when she gets a little bit older, she learns about welding, mechanics and construction. She should be able to see a path to becoming an ironworker or a steamfitter as something that she can pursue if she'd like, and if she does, I would happily support her in that adventure. There are career paths that anyone should be able to pursue that are just as important as being a teacher, a nurse or a lawyer.

I recently joined the minister, along with my friend the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues, for an announcement in Waterloo region about an investment in the local workforce planning board—I mentioned this earlier: \$600,000 is going to provide 30 women and under-represented groups with the opportunity to get the training they need to become licensed and certified truck drivers. I spoke about this announcement, as I said, earlier this afternoon, but again, I'll repeat that women only make up 4% of all truck drivers here in the province. That's less than 4,000 female truck drivers across the roads here in Ontario. We need to do a better job of not only promoting these opportunities to women and other under-represented groups, but also amplifying the voices of that 4% in the industry, so that girls, like my daughter, can see them.

I'm talking about trucking extensively because the postings in this industry are now up to the same level they were in February 2020, and having spoken with several employers in my region, they were crying out for candidates to fill these good-paying jobs. They're well-paying, secure jobs in the skilled trades that have been impacted less than other sectors, and they are still in demand. In fact, more people are working in manufacturing now than there were 13 months ago.

For those who have found themselves out of work and looking to pursue a new career, the trades are absolutely a viable option for them. We have launched and redesigned the Second Career program to get laid-off workers trained for in-demand jobs. This program will provide them with assistance for tuition, training materials and other living expenses.

Our recent Ontario budget also introduced the Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit, which will provide an estimated \$230 million in assistance for about 230,000 people who are going back to school to retrain to get new skills. These workers deserve a hand up to support them through their training.

In addition to supporting workers who are looking for new opportunities, those in the workforce have not been forgotten about. While this legislation will help make sure they have a job to go back to every day, one of the first things we did during the pandemic was provide them with job-protected leave so that they could go back to work if they had to leave their job because of COVID-19—and that job would still be there for them when they got back.

I've heard the opposition mention paid sick days time and time again. Our Premier was instrumental in negotiating the Safe Restart Agreement with the federal government, which includes four weeks of paid sick days through the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit. What Ontarians do not need right now is duplication of a program that is already available to them. There is over \$700 million currently waiting to be spent for this program; 300,000 Ontarians have already taken part in it. I will continue to raise awareness about this available program to my constituents, just as all the other government colleagues are doing, and I hope that the opposition is doing so as well, because they deserve to know that that program is out there to assist them.

As I wrap up my second time rising to speak to this important bill, I want to thank the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development for his unwavering commitment to the workers of this province. Through bills like this that protect the jobs they rely on, to launching one of the largest workplace safety inspection blitzes ever to ensure they are safe at work, he has been there advocating for them from day one, and he deserves to be commended for doing so.

I know that we all can't wait to see what will happen when it's safe to reopen this province and get our small businesses back up and running.

I'm going to wrap up here by repeating the words of our minister: We need the support of the Legislature now for this bill to help relieve the pressure businesses are facing

so that they can survive and build a stronger economic future for our province. So while I know they didn't support us at second reading, I hope the opposition will stand with us this time around and get this bill passed, for both workers and employers here in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Your first question comes from the member from Toronto Centre.

Ms. Suze Morrison: I want to thank the member from Kitchener–Conestoga for his comments.

In the latter part of his remarks, he talked about supporting workers, and he said that they wanted to make sure that no one in the workforce felt like they had been left behind.

When I talk to folks in my community—workers in my community, in Toronto Centre, feel absolutely left behind by this government.

We're talking about a government whose first move in office was axing the \$1 increase to the \$15 minimum wage.

Since the pandemic has started, where have you been with support for workers? You consistently vote down paid sick days. You voted against pay increases for PSWs. You voted against mental health supports for health care workers. Where in your actions are you actually supporting workers—other than absolutely leaving them behind? This bill here, really, lowers WSIB premiums for employers. What are you actually doing to support workers in the province of Ontario?

Mr. Mike Harris: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that our government has done a lot since being elected in 2018 to support workers here in the province.

It's unfortunate, because we really, as Conservatives, now have become the party of working-class Ontarians; it used to be—

Laughter.

Mr. Mike Harris: It used to be the NDP. They can sit there laughing all they want, but personally, I don't think it's funny at all. We have done a lot, obviously, from the beginning, lowering taxes, making it more affordable for people and anybody who's raising a family to do so here in the province of Ontario. I take great pride in that.

It's unfortunate that a Conservative government has to come in and clean up the mess from the government before. We saw that, again, back in my father's days in government.

The NDP doesn't ever like to talk about Bob Rae, so let's talk about him for a minute. A Conservative government had to come in—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): You've run out of time, but thank you for the opportunity.

The next question goes to the member from Brantford–Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate my colleague from Kitchener–Conestoga talking about this legislation. I know he brought that up and spoke about it extensively during his speech this afternoon, but I was wondering if he

could detail a little bit more about how Bill 238 is supporting businesses during this pandemic.

We're still going to see a maximum insurable earnings ceiling that's going up. Can the member please explain how this legislation supports businesses if the maximum insurable earnings cap is going up by 2%?

Mr. Mike Harris: Without this legislation, I believe that that rate was going to go up to 7.8%, which is a very, very substantial increase. Keeping it at that rate that we froze it at last year will allow businesses to then reinvest that money—that 7.8%, I think, amounts to something like \$2 billion—and put that back into their businesses. I think that's really important, when we look at how things are going to happen post-pandemic. We want to make sure that businesses are able to support workers and still be there for them when we're ready to come back and open up this province. Doing this is going to help those businesses stay afloat and make sure that they're there for their employees as we move back into reopening.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Mushkegowuk–James Bay.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I heard the member from Kitchener–Conestoga talk about how they don't want WSIB or WSIA to have surpluses, so they're going to help the employers. But WSIB was made to help injured workers.

You heard from injured workers' groups making recommendations, we brought recommendations forward that you voted against—and yet you're here across and saying you represent workers?

When there's a surplus, surpluses should go to injured workers. When you heard injured workers' groups talk about how they have to go on OW and ODSP to make ends meet—there are surpluses, so we give it to the big corporations, the big companies?

My question to you is, why didn't you help the injured workers who needed to be helped, when that was designed to help injured workers?

1710

Mr. Mike Harris: As I said in my debate earlier, this does not impact the way that premiums will be paid out to injured workers. That will stay the same. People will still be able to access WSIB if they get hurt on the job. That isn't changing.

What's happening here is, we're making sure that businesses can stay afloat, to make sure that those people have a job to go back to when they rehabilitate or if they've lost their job because of a downturn in the economy. It has nothing to do with not paying injured workers. I want to be very clear about that.

We will continue to stand up for everybody here in this province, and we will continue to make necessary investments into the systems that need it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for his comments.

I would just like to know why it's important that this bill be passed now. You've talked about some pretty big

numbers in your comments, and I know we're doing everything we can to support small businesses that are really struggling. I have a lot of hospitality and restaurant businesses in my riding that are certainly challenged. Can you tell us why, a year into the pandemic, this legislation is important, please?

Mr. Mike Harris: I don't think there's a better time for something like this to happen. Quite frankly, when we're looking at all of the different tools the government has available to make sure we're supporting employers during a really, really tough economic downturn due to the pandemic, we need to be doing everything we can to make sure that they're being supported and that those businesses are solvent, especially right now. Like I said, with people unfortunately having to be laid off, or they may have lost their jobs just because—obviously, like you said, the hospitality sector has been hit very hard by this.

Levelling the playing field, freezing the rates at what they were last year, which is, essentially, what we're doing here, will make sure that we keep more money in the system for these businesses to be able to reinvest back in—to make sure that they're there to reopen for their employees when the time comes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Brampton East.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: The point I'm going to ask the member about is a point we've been bringing up a lot recently, about the fact that workers need more supports and that experts, mayors, people across the board have all said that paid sick days would be a major way of adding support to workers.

Will the member finally recognize the evidence, the science, the experts and support the position that paid sick days will help workers?

Mr. Mike Harris: Speaker, we've been over this time and time again today. There already is a program that supports paid sick days for workers here in the province of Ontario. We have fought tooth and nail, as the government, to work with the federal government to make sure that they were providing this. There's still over \$700 million available for people in this province to access. Like I said, I know here on the government benches we are touting this program from the rooftops, but I don't hear anything from the NDP out there saying that this program is available. There's one taxpayer in this province. I don't know why we need to gouge them twice or three times or whatever to be able to pay for programs that already exist.

My question back to the member opposite is, will he commit to being out there and recommending this program to people who call his office?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the honourable gentleman. His comments are always very, very thoughtful. He has vast knowledge and experience in a lot of the things that we're talking about.

I know, as I said earlier, he's still reeling from questions earlier with respect to the member from Brampton East and his lack of desire when it comes to speeding up health

care investments in his riding with ministerial zoning orders. I was shocked at that; I shouldn't have been, because he voted against it earlier today.

My question to the honourable gentleman is this: Why is it so important that we continue to improve—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pose your question, please.

Hon. Paul Calandra:—whether it's workplace safety and insurance, health care, long-term care—all of the things that have been such a failure for 15 years of the previous Liberal government. Why is it so important that we continue on that road?

Mr. Mike Harris: I would have loved to have heard some comments from the Liberals today about what they thought about this bill, as well.

The fact of the matter is that we have to invest and rebuild systems that the previous government decimated over the last 15 years. We will continue to do that, and that will be an absolute commitment this government will stand behind.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It gives me great pleasure to rise today to add the voices of the great people of London North Centre—although I will say that I would like to add them in a different way, in that London has just had a positivity rate of COVID-19 of almost 30%, the highest in Ontario. Nearly seven hours ago, I asked this government to declare London a hot spot. So far, there have been crickets. We need mobile testing, we need more vaccines, we need to vaccinate front-line workers, and we need to ensure that this virus is contained. Yet this government is content to talk about WSIB.

I'll turn my comments toward WSIB. They've refused to overhaul a system that people know is fraught with problems.

This legislation, Bill 238, is redundant. It's duplicative. It's unnecessary. The WSIB has already announced that there were rate freezes for the entirety of 2021, and yet this government is content, during this pandemic, to talk about this legislation. Like the Liberals before them, they have lowered employer premiums while workers have been continually subjected to the process known as deeming. Injured workers are forced by this government, by previous governments and by this government's current inaction to live in poverty. This legislation itself has nothing to do with workers. In fact, workers are mentioned in this legislation once, and only as property of their employer; they don't even exist on their own.

I'd like to add to the record comments that were sent to me by Thelma, who was advocating on behalf of her sister Valerie. I'd like to share her story. Valerie slipped and fell at work and saw a nurse on-site, but due to what was going on in her life, she was unable to see a doctor during for some time. Many people, as we know, in this province, aren't able to see a doctor quickly. Her injury became so severe—she had two tears in a rotator cuff and bone spurs—that she had to apply to WSIB. This began a years-long battle. WSIB lost her paperwork, and then when she

resubmitted they denied her claim. She has had four different caseworkers, and each time she has had to start from scratch. She started her case 11 years ago. She has had years of pain, inability to move her arm properly, and she has had three surgeries. They awarded her a paltry sum of money. In order to achieve that sum, they took into consideration her age—she was nearing retirement—which ends up taking away money from the settlement. My question to this government is: How does a long-standing injury, or the fact that she's closer to retirement, make her injury worth less? It doesn't.

This government, through Bill 238, could have taken care of things like this. They could have adequately looked into WSIB and that system and overhauled it, and yet they chose not to.

I also received a letter recently about an ongoing situation at Toyota. Jake shares this letter with me, and I'd like to read it into the record today:

"I am deeply concerned about my health and safety and that of my co-workers, family members and community due to the decision announced on April 1 to instruct approximately 150 TMMC workers at high risk of recent COVID-19 exposure to self-isolate for 14 days but continue" to report to work under "work self-isolation guidelines."

Speaker, how is it possible to self-isolate in a factory environment? It isn't.

1720

I'll continue: "The province's testing and clearance guidelines clearly state that work self-isolation 'is generally not recommended for any workers in non-health care settings due to the potential for contacts with high-risk exposures to be infectious, and barriers to ensuring appropriate and consistent infection prevention and control measures to prevent transmission.'"

So 150 people who were exposed to COVID-19 at the Toyota manufacturing plant were told that they needed to self-isolate at work. That flies in the face of everything that we understand about this virus.

Additionally, we heard from the Premier and the Minister of Education today that in-person learning would be on hiatus after this postponed school break. The opposition knew that back when this government cancelled March break, the April break was going to turn into something else; we absolutely knew. Yet they took that break away from parents, families and students, and now they've ruined it; they've stepped all over it. Parents and families have no idea what they're going to do moving forward. This should have been a break for them, this should have been a mental health pause, and yet it's completely ruined, and it's Monday.

Kara wrote to me. In light of schools closing, in light of the Premier and the Minister of Education denying that COVID-19 is being transmitted in schools, she indicated to me that child care centres are open.

I need to ask: Will this government do the right thing? Will they do the proactive thing? Will they do the conscientious thing and will they ensure that ECEs get the vaccine, yes or no? Schools are closed based on transfer of

COVID-19 in schools. Are they going to now try to float the line that somehow COVID-19 is not going to be transmitted at daycares? That would be quite an interesting thing for anyone to try to believe.

I'd like to talk first about the process of deeming and the story of Mark Winegarden. In 2007, paramedic Mark Winegarden had to carry a cardiac arrest patient. He heard a pop in his back. The WSIB decided that this was a pre-existing condition. This was all because a doctor who had never met him, who had never even seen him face to face, decided this was the case. It started a terrible saga for Mark and the WSIB. Eventually, he won his case, and you'd think the story was over. But then he was hit by what was known as deeming. Deeming is the process where the WSIB decides that a worker is capable of doing a different job that doesn't actually exist, what's known as a phantom job. It takes away the pay that a worker would receive.

Just to take this very human and very important consideration and boil it down into numbers so that this government will understand—because we know this government is impervious to human stories; instead, they like numbers and cents. Let's have a simplified example. Let's say there's an individual who earns \$900 a week in construction and then injures himself permanently. With WSIB policies, he's supposed to be compensated at about 85% of his original pay until retirement age. Even though he can't work construction, the WSIB decides that he could work at a clothing store. If he's able to work at a clothing store, according to the WSIB—not according to doctors, not according to medical professionals—then he would be able to get, let's say, \$464 a week. So 85% of \$900 is \$765, but after that deeming process—that phantom job that doesn't necessarily exist, one that, according to his doctors, he cannot do—he will receive \$201 a week, because \$765 minus that \$464 will mean he gets \$201. And that's not to say there's even a job at a clothing store, but the WSIB decides there is—again, that phantom job.

If we take a look at the cuts that have happened and the lowering of employer premiums, that is something that is not new to this government. That has been around since the Liberals. WSIB, in order to manage its costs, has cut down on the amount of money that they have provided to workers who are legitimately injured—ones who have had life-changing injuries. They can't hide people who have passed away, but they can decide for the people who have traumatic injuries—it's just not enough.

There have been letters sent to Premier Wynne by numerous medical professionals, numerous researchers, people who are in education, calling for an overhaul at WSIB. The pages go on and on. Yet they didn't heed that call. They didn't do the right thing. The Liberals didn't stand up for workers—and quite frankly, neither is this government.

This letter was signed by more than 140 doctors, legal clinics and labour groups, but the government then ignored it—and still we have WSIB, which is in desperate need of an overhaul.

When I first saw the title of this bill, I must admit, I thought that maybe this government was doing the right thing, that maybe they were finally going to stand up for workers, but we know that's not the case. When workers show up once within this legislation—and as subject to or property of—that tells you something.

The 2016 cuts that we were talking about—and this government will probably point to the Liberals before them. They will play the blame game. But we knew, back in 2016, that WSIB moved away from the medical advice provided by individuals' doctors in favour of opinions of physicians that the WSIB employed. They're hired guns. This legislation does nothing to address that. These specialty clinics will push workers back onto the job when it's unsafe, when they're at risk of further injury. It's absolutely disgusting.

Injured workers are forced to live in poverty, and that's because of this government's inaction. So many have contacted my office who have contributed to the system. They have done the right thing. They have worked hard for a living. It wasn't their fault that they were injured, and yet, the process that has gone on here—and that has gone on here, historically, for years—has put them on the margins of society.

There's an opportunity here for you to stand up for workers—all of the amendments that the NDP brought forward, voted down. It's penny-wise and pound foolish, as well. There are people who need support, people who need a bit of help, and yet, by cutting a budget line or cutting the budget on the back of injured workers, you're going to end up costing the province much more money down the road.

Let's take a look at a few statistics. Injured workers experience four times the rate of poverty in Ontario. One in five workers live in extreme poverty—less than \$10,000 per year. Only seven of the injured workers who were surveyed in this study had used a food bank before they were injured—after the injury, 77. One in five workers loses their home after an injury. Over 50% are unable to afford the prescriptions they need. And before the injury, almost 90% were employed full-time. It's an absolute shame.

Yet WSIB rakes in a tremendous amount of money. In 2017, WSIB posted a profit, a surplus of revenue over expenditure of \$3.524 billion, and in 2018, when there were stock market losses, it still had a profit of \$2.165 billion—billions of dollars. Yet it doesn't go to workers. If that weren't bad enough, the WSIB has actually released their own strategic plan to save money. An organization or a social support that was meant to protect the interests of injured workers actually has a plan to save money. Do you know how they do that? Of course, they do that by denying claims. They do that on the backs of people who are injured, people whose lives have been impacted immeasurably, people who can't fight this system anymore. And this government again refuses to stand with workers.

1730

So this strategic plan promised a reduction in the serious injury and fatality rate from 2017's benchmark

rate, and they say they're going to do this by 2021. They wanted to reduce it by 3.9%. It also promises a reduction in the number of workers receiving a loss-of-earnings benefit, and they talk about this with the 72-month mark, because in 2017, 72 months would be in 2021. So the question is, how could WSIB achieve the benchmark if the fatality rate is the same and other numbers are the same? It's easy: The people who are injured and who have not lost their lives will suffer deeming.

We could go on and on and on about just how horrendous this system is, what it has done to people, how it has ruined their lives, how they have lost their home, they've lost their workplace, they've lost sometimes their value in life. When the government should be there to help them, to make sure that they're okay, instead they have to prove their injury again and again and again, like Valerie, only to be denied, only to be told, "Your injury is not worth that much, because you're ready to retire." What a thing to hear.

Workers should never be pushed into poverty as a result of injury. Nobody chooses to be injured. Inherent in this sort of posture, in this attitude, in this wilful desire to not overhaul the WSIB system is a judgment. It's a judgment that injured workers are somehow trying to milk the system, they're making this up, they're just looking for a free ride. That kind of judgment is disgraceful. That kind of judgment is inhumane. That kind of judgment takes away the experience, some of the worst experiences that people could have ever had.

You know, it's quite frankly comical, Speaker, to hear this government say that it stands on the side of workers when we see legislation like this that has absolutely nothing to do with workers. You can't stand for workers just by an unintended consequence of this legislation. Yes, this legislation removes payments from businesses, but that doesn't necessarily by extension create jobs. That connection is not distinct.

From the beginning of this pandemic, from April, we've been calling on this government to support small businesses. Small businesses have been crying out, asking for some attention, asking for support, and yet here we are, moving into the third wave, plowing forward, because this government did not do the right things. They did not make sure that our communities were safe, and COVID infections are on the rise as a result.

I was glad to see that this government provided some form of support to small businesses, eventually, in January, with their small business grant, but for so many folks it was too little, too late. So many businesses had already closed. To this government, I would recommend that you look at what you're saying and look at your actions, and see how those two things don't necessarily always align.

We heard just today that schools will be going into full remote learning once again. We know that that is going to have such a terrible impact on students with special needs. We know that that's going to have a tremendous impact on all students and their mental health, because we know that kids just want to see their friends.

It shouldn't have been this way. If we had had asymptomatic testing, and legitimate asymptomatic testing, if we'd had proper ventilation, if we'd had smaller class sizes, then we wouldn't be here discussing this right now. We wouldn't be plowing ahead into the third wave. Instead, we'd be in a recovery that this government likes to think will happen. But I'd like to remind them of the human costs that their actions and their inaction have caused.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for questions. I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I actually wanted to seize a little bit on something that the member talked about early on in his speech, and since it was in his speech, I think we can talk about it.

He mentioned an incident that happened at Toyota. Now, of course, he only gave half the story, really, didn't he? I wonder if he might want to expand on that a little bit and go into the fact that Toyota is participating in the rapid testing program; that the advice given to the workers came from the local public health unit and the Chief Medical Officer of Health in the area—the circumstances around what he was talking about.

But more importantly, I want to ask the honourable gentleman if it is, then, his assertion that we should not be listening to the local public health unit and the Chief Medical Officer of Health in the area. Is it his belief that in the Toyota instance, they were wrong, and the provincial government should assume responsibility for that public health unit?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the government House leader for his question. I don't think that we're here to play politics, but what I can tell you is that it seems to fly in the face of what we understand about COVID-19 that workers were asked to self-isolate while at work. I don't think anyone could deny that in that scenario, it doesn't make sense.

Speaking to a number of different workers—and I'd suggest that the government House leader do the same—you notice that on certain lines within Toyota, it is impossible to distance. It is impossible to remain in a safe—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Government House leader, come to order, please.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Had Toyota responded in a certain way and suggested different work opportunities for people in an isolated fashion, perhaps that wouldn't have been a concern. But I'm sure that the government House leader, as he has just indicated, heard the same concerns from workers. It's too bad he didn't act on them.

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

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I want to thank my colleague from London North Centre. You mentioned in your presentation that the WSIB had a lot of surpluses. I asked the question to the government earlier. They prefer giving these breaks to these big employers, but they're saying, "No, no. We didn't touch the injured workers' benefits," and yet, we heard with injured workers' presentations that

injured workers live on OW and ODSP—and you mentioned that also—in poverty.

How would we have approached it? If the WSIB has surpluses, where should that money be going to? Should it go to employers or to the benefit of injured workers, which is what the WSIB was created for?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Mushkegowuk—James Bay for his excellent question. It doesn't make any sense that the WSIB is posting record surpluses and considering how to invest their billions of dollars that they're making on the backs of injured workers.

The process, as I discussed, of deeming or of phantom jobs, of trying to remove money from people who are entitled to be helped—these people were injured in their jobs, and yet this government would like to pretend that they could go to work—their doctor may not say so—and they want to try to claw that money back. That's a disgrace.

I think that surplus, which largely has been created by the process of phantom jobs and deeming, should go to the worker. It should go to making sure that they are—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Ten seconds.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Nobody asked to be injured at work, and nobody should be treated this way by the WSIB or by the government in their inaction.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: It has been a pleasure to rise many times this afternoon and take part in debate and questions and comments. To the member from London North Centre—I believe I got that right, if I've been paying attention—

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Harris: Excellent. I'm getting the thumbs-up.

1740

It's just an interesting line of conversation that's coming from the opposition. They keep talking about us wanting to do more for businesses here in the province, especially ones that are being directly affected by what's happening during the pandemic. We have a bill here that is going to put more money back into businesses within the province, to the tune of several hundred million dollars, yet the opposition keeps talking about how that's not enough, we should be doing more. But they're not going to support this bill—at least, that's what it seems like. We'll wait until it comes time for a vote.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): If you have a question, now is a good time to put it.

Mr. Mike Harris: Yes. To the member opposite: Will you stand here with us and support putting more money back into the small businesses here in the province of Ontario?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: From the very beginning of this pandemic, back in March, the NDP has offered so many positive, proactive, thoughtful solutions that we brought forward to the government. We have wanted to work well with this government. In fact, our Save Main

Street plan was one that was endorsed by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

But if I turn my comments towards Bill 238 itself, we brought up a number of different amendments within committee that this government voted down. It would be easy to support Bill 238 if it included the stopping of the process known as deeming. It would also have been helpful if they had enacted presumptive legislation to cover people who are impacted by COVID-19 during this pandemic, such as the member from Niagara Falls.

But yet this government wants to pretend that we don't support business by not supporting this. We support business. We always have and we always will. We were the first out of the gate with the Save Main Street plan. It's a shame that it took this government until January—

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

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you to the member from London North Centre for your remarks. Actually, London North Centre—some of you may know—I lived in that riding for a few years when my husband was doing his PhD at Western. So I'm quite fond of the city. I know that London has a really phenomenal tech community, a tech start-up community especially.

I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about the supports that the small business community in your riding in London North Centre, and particularly those tech start-ups trying to come up out of the university—what kind of supports they're not seeing from this government.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: As we've said, we were glad to finally see some grants and some supports come from this government in January and February. But it undermines the ability of some companies and how well they were able to pivot during this pandemic. Many of these businesses have been able to turn into research and development, have been able to change their product offering, have been able to enter different fields, and yet, the application process for this grant is very, very linear. If you fit into two different categories, you have to choose one and then you might possibly get denied.

I've been working with a number of different constituents and helping them navigate this process. There needs to be many more supports, especially for folks who have struggled, such as women, during this pandemic.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Our final question goes to the member from Brantford–Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: It seems bizarre that members of this Legislature would oppose financial relief for businesses in

Ontario, because it seems to me that if we don't have employers, there's no way we can have employees. We know—we agree—that the previous government left workers and businesses behind, but things are different now, and we're in the middle of a global pandemic.

My question is, why does the member from London North Centre still not want to support the people and businesses that are struggling to get by? And if that's not the case and he does want to support small businesses, will he support this legislation?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Brantford–Brant for his question. He's absolutely right: There is no economy without people. People are at the foundation of everything. And yet, we've seen this government bluster forward, make ridiculous changes and decisions, putting people at risk, forcing people into work environments, putting them on the front lines and putting them at risk of COVID infection. And now we're in the third wave.

So I would like to say, we need to have balance in life. We need to make sure that, yes, we respect business, but we also have to respect people. Bill 238 does one side. I've pointed it out again and again: It mentions workers once. Don't pretend that you stand on the side of workers when your legislation itself mentions them one paltry time. Do the right thing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We only have 35 seconds. I don't think that's enough time for another question and a response, so further debate? Further debate?

Mr. McNaughton has moved third reading of Bill 238, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I believe I heard a no.

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

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We have more than five members standing. Therefore, a recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

Third reading vote deferred.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): There being no further business, this House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1746.

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Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA) / Ministre associée des Transports (RGT) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	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)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

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-présidente: Donna Skelly
Teresa J. Armstrong, Toby Barrett
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto
Randy Hillier, 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**

Chair / Président: Amarjot Sandhu
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeremy Roberts
Ian Arthur, Stan Cho
Catherine Fife, Mitzie Hunter
Logan Kanapathi, Sol Mamakwa
David Piccini, Jeremy Roberts
Amarjot Sandhu, Dave Smith
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Présidente: Goldie Ghamari
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Mike Schreiner
Jill Andrew, Robert Bailey
Guy Bourgouin, Stephen Crawford
Goldie Ghamari, Chris Glover
Mike Harris, Sheref Sabawy
Amarjot Sandhu, Mike Schreiner
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Président: Gilles Bisson
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Aris Babikian, Gilles Bisson
Will Bouma, Lorne Coe
Wayne Gates, Robin Martin
Norman Miller, Rick Nicholls
Billy Pang, Amanda Simard
Marit Stiles
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Julia Douglas

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lucille Collard
Will Bouma, Lucille Collard
Parm Gill, Daryl Kramp
Natalia Kusendova, Suze Morrison
Lindsey Park, Gurratan Singh
Nina Tangri, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Kaleed Rasheed
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Rima Berns-McGown, Michael Coteau
Faisal Hassan, Logan Kanapathi
Michael Mantha, Jim McDonell
Christina Maria Mitas, Sam Oosterhoff
Kaleed Rasheed, Donna Skelly
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Taras Natyshak
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Jessica Bell, Stephen Blais
Stephen Crawford, Rudy Cuzzetto
France Gélinas, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Taras Natyshak
Michael Parsa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Logan Kanapathi
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Fraser
Will Bouma, John Fraser
Logan Kanapathi, Vincent Ke
Laura Mae Lindo, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Jeremy Roberts
Dave Smith, Daisy Wai
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Deepak Anand
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Bhutila Karpoche
Deepak Anand, Aris Babikian
Jeff Burch, Amy Fee
Michael Gravelle, Joel Harden
Mike Harris, Christine Hogarth
Belinda C. Karahalios, Bhutila Karpoche
Natalia Kusendova
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

**Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight /
Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations
d'urgence**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Tom Rakocevic
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
John Fraser, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Robin Martin
Sam Oosterhoff, Lindsey Park
Tom Rakocevic, Sara Singh
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell