

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 199

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N^o 199

1st Session
42nd Parliament
Monday
26 October 2020

1^{re} session
42^e législature
Lundi
26 octobre 2020

Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Todd Decker

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House Publications and Language Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
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111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1180-2987

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 26 October 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 26 octobre 2020

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

MURRAY WHETUNG COMMUNITY
SERVICE AWARD ACT, 2020
LOI DE 2020 SUR LES PRIX
MURRAY WHETUNG POUR SERVICES
À LA COLLECTIVITÉ

Mr. Dave Smith moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 220, An Act to provide for an award for exceptional cadets / Projet de loi 220, Loi prévoyant la remise d'un prix aux cadets exceptionnels.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member from Peterborough–Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that.

When I first started looking at doing this bill, it was a natural fit to reach out to the Whetung family in Curve Lake. One of the things that Murray Whetung had said to me was, "Don't read notes when you talk about this." He said that in their culture, they tell stories all the time to show respect for the individual they're talking about and that it's a little bit more disrespectful when it's written notes for it, so to honour Mr. Whetung, I'm going to do the speech completely without any notes.

During the First and Second World Wars, First Nations individuals were not eligible to be conscripted, yet more than 4,000 of them volunteered for the First World War, and more than 3,000 volunteered for the Second World War. For those of you who haven't read the Indian Act, there are some things in it that are injustices. This is one of them: If you were away from your reserve—not away from a First Nation, but your specific reserve—for more than four years, you lost your status as a First Nations individual. Many of these individuals, especially in the First World War, voluntarily went overseas to serve their country, to fight for their country. Those who were overseas for more than four years, when they returned back to Canada, lost their status as First Nations individuals.

Fast-forward to the Second World War: We have a new generation of people knowing what had happened in the First World War, and yet more than 3,000 of those First Nations individuals stepped up and volunteered for the

armed services so that they could go over to Europe and fight for Canada. When they returned, some of them lost their status as First Nations individuals. This was an injustice.

Many of them were not allowed into Legions although they were veterans, and yet many of them continued to give back to their communities, because they recognized the value of volunteerism, of giving back to their communities. That's what this award is about. It's giving us the opportunity, then, to tell the stories of those First Nations individuals who lost their status. It gives us the ability to celebrate that they continued to give back to their community. They saw the value in volunteering and helping others. This award is an award that celebrates what they did and how they gave back.

With respect to Mr. Whetung, he was a Second World War veteran. He was actually a communications lineman, so he did not carry a rifle and go into battle, but he frequently went into battle. Most people aren't aware of what these communications linemen did. They made sure that the communications from the front lines to the command post were up and running. And there were many times in the cover of darkness that he was on the front line and they would set a tent up over top of the communication line that had been damaged so that the enemy could not see the light while they repaired those communication lines.

Murray told me the one story where they were very close to the front. They were actually hiding in the underbrush of a ditch. German tanks came across the road and caught those communication lines and tore them up. About five minutes after the tanks had gone through, when they thought the coast was clear, they went back out into the open, in daylight, and they fixed those communication lines because the front lines needed to know what was going on and the command post needed to know what was happening at the front. So he put his life in danger on a daily basis this way without carrying a weapon.

The ship that he was on for D-Day was actually scheduled to be part of the first wave to Juno Beach because they had to establish communications. According to Mr. Whetung, he wasn't sure whether they were lucky or whether they were unfortunate, but his ship was torpedoed the day before the D-Day invasion and it damaged the rudder, so he didn't go over to Juno Beach until day 3. He believes he was lucky because he wasn't part of that first group that was basically wiped out.

Fast forward a little bit to the end of the war—this is indicative of what Murray Whetung did. He was stationed in Germany. The officers were given a hotel, and it was his responsibility to wire the hotel for communications so

that there would be telephones in each of the rooms. On one day, his sergeant came to him and said, "Private Whetung, I have another job for you." Murray spun around and said, "I'm sorry, sir. I have two days left on this job. I have to get it finished before you can give me anything else to do. I'm happy to do it, but you've got to give me two days." He said the sergeant snickered and walked off.

Murray spent the next two days finishing all of the communication in the hotel. On the third day, he went to see his sergeant. His sergeant said, "Murray, the new job is we're sending you back to Canada. You could have gone home two days early but you felt it was more important to finish your job than go back to Canada." This is indicative of the service that he did. He wanted to make sure that he always had his job finished. He wanted to make sure that his responsibility was always taken care of.

When he came back to Canada—he tells an interesting story about this as well. They get to Kingston. He and some friends couldn't wait for the train to get them back up to Cobourg, so they hired a taxi. Seven of them piled into the taxi; it cost them \$2 each to get up to Cobourg by taxi. Murray hitchhiked his way back to Curve Lake. He wasn't expected to be home until Monday. He was a newlywed; he had gotten married just before he had gone off to war. His wife wasn't expecting him until Monday, but this was Saturday morning. His brothers and a few others were heading off hunting, and they caught him on the road coming into Curve Lake. Well, since his wife wasn't expecting him until Monday, why not go hunting for the weekend with his friends? So, off they went hunting.

As part of his leave, when they were out hunting, they had gotten in their canoes and they'd gone to one of the islands near Curve Lake. It turned cold while they were out there. Murray had to report back to Kingston. The lake had partially frozen and they couldn't paddle the canoes across the lake because the ice was too thick for the canoes to go across, but it wasn't thick enough for them to stand on the ice. So he had to wait a few more days until it got thick enough that they could have one foot in the canoe and one foot on the ice, and propel themselves back home.

0910

When he got to Kingston, he was hauled in by the commanding officer to find out why he was late, why he didn't return on time, and he told the story: They'd gone out hunting, the lake froze and they couldn't get back because of that. Well, the officers who were there started to laugh. It was the most original excuse for being late reporting back, so Murray didn't get into any trouble.

When he left the Armed Forces, this is where they discovered another injustice: The federal government did not provide benefits for two ministries. So if you were receiving benefits from one ministry, you could not receive benefits from another ministry. Keep in mind that Murray was a Second World War veteran who had served on the front lines, who had put his life in danger, who had originally been part of the D-Day invasion. But Veterans Affairs did not provide him with a pension. Veterans Affairs did not provide him with any of the health benefits

because, as a First Nation individual, they deemed that he was receiving benefits through—at the time it was referred to as "Indian Affairs." This was another injustice that he had.

They pushed back against it. They had trouble finding all of the First Nation individuals, so Murray volunteered to be part of a group that would reach out to find all of these First Nation individuals who were spread out across Canada. He was so well-liked by his peers in that group that they made him the treasurer.

Murray was treasurer for a couple of years, and he'd gotten to the point where he didn't want to do it anymore, but he didn't want to disappoint anyone. So the next year, when they held their elections and they asked him to stand again, he reluctantly said yes. But he truly did not want the position. It was a secret ballot vote. Murray voted for his competitor, and his competitor won by a single vote, so Murray was able to absolve himself of that job without disappointing anyone.

When he came back to Curve Lake and when he settled, he gave back to his community continuously. He raised his family in such a way that they understood it was important to give back to their community, so much so that his son Lorenzo has served multiple times on Curve Lake council. But it didn't stop with just his immediate family. Murray spoke to so many people in his community, Murray inspired so many people in his community, so much so that his granddaughter is now the Chief of Curve Lake.

If you knew nothing else of Murray Whetung, the fact that he inspired multiple generations of his own family to give back to their community, to serve their community—that alone should tell you why it's important for us to have an award to inspire the next generation of young leaders. Murray Whetung espouses all of the virtues that we want these young leaders to have: Give back to your community. Volunteer. If you can do more, do more. Because when you make your community better, when you give back, when you inspire others to give back, you're doing something very positive.

Murray will be 99 this year, in about two or three weeks' time. I think it's very fitting, just before Remembrance Day, that we have the opportunity to celebrate one of Canada's unsung heroes, a veteran who stepped forward and volunteered when he didn't have to because he felt it was his duty to give back to his community. He felt it was his duty to make sure that Canada was a better place. And even after Canada turned its back on him and his fellow First Nation individuals, he continued to give back, because he recognized that that's what makes a better community: standing up, volunteering and giving back.

I ask everyone in the House here today to please pass this bill, so we can honour the memory of Murray Whetung.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: It gives me great pleasure to rise today and speak in support of this private member's bill, introduced by the member from Peterborough-Kawartha. This is a bill I think all members of

this House can be proud of. I think it shows we can support our work co-operatively and help create a better Ontario.

It is my honour to speak about a distinguished veteran. This bill is named after Ojibway elder and Second World War veteran Murray Whetung. Mr. Whetung lives in Curve Lake First Nation, where his granddaughter is the chief of the community. He is the last remaining Curve Lake veteran of the Second World War. He served as a signalman and was instrumental in running lines from Juno Beach to Brussels.

Mr. Whetung received the following medals: the 1939-1945 Star, the France and Germany Star, the Defence Medal, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp and the War Medal 1939-1945. He also qualified for the General Service Badge.

If Mr. Whetung had been away from his community for more than four years, he would have been disenfranchised. He would have lost his status in his community. Fortunately, his service fell just short of that mark. Murray carried on after the war, with service to his community and his family. He sat on his band council, was active as a leader in his church, and carried out many roles where his legacy of service left its mark. His deep love of his family and roots in Curve Lake are very evident in his life story. I've enjoyed watching interviews with him and reading his memoirs.

Mr. Whetung, we would like to thank you for your service to this country. I believe this bill is a testament to your service.

It is fitting that an award would be named after Mr. Whetung, especially one that recognizes exceptional citizenship and the community service of cadets across Ontario. The cadet program has assisted many young people in finding their paths in life while serving their communities in a variety of ways. The program is for young people between 12 and 19 and provides experiences, from flying and sailing and orienteering, and promotes physical fitness.

It is always a pleasure as an MPP to be at events with cadets, who demonstrate such discipline and pride. I would like to recognize the cadets instructor teams as well. They lead young cadets by setting such a fine example for our young people.

If this bill passes, the Murray Whetung Community Service Award Act will provide an annual award to a cadet from the Royal Canadian Air Cadets, army cadets and sea cadets who demonstrates exceptional citizenship and volunteerism in their community. The official opposition supports this private member's bill because we support and love cadet programs. We are also proud of the exceptional young cadets that work hard and make a difference.

We also support the naming of the bill after Murray Whetung. I believe the naming of this award after a member of Curve Lake First Nation is significant. Mr. Whetung is an exceptional citizen of the Peterborough-Kawartha riding. The name of this bill not only honours Murray's contribution but also the contribution of over 3,000 Indigenous women and men who served during

World War II. It speaks to our need to further recognize the contribution of Indigenous people who served in the Second World War. Indigenous soldiers were shoulder to shoulder during the war but were not treated equally to other veterans afterwards.

I'd like to speak about Thunder Bay for a moment. In my riding, Fort William First Nation has a Remembrance Day ceremony in honour of all veterans of Fort William First Nation. I would like to read into the record the names of those who served. I'd like to do this today to recognize the injustices these Indigenous veterans have faced and continue to face in Canada.

Killed in battle: Arthur Bannon and John Louis.

Wounded in battle: Dennis MacLaurin and Francis Banning.

Served in battle: Richard Johnson, Leonard Johnson, William Johnson, Tommy Johnson, Patrick Johnson, Thomas Lewis, Edward Louis, Wilford Louis, Charlie MacLaurin, George Cyrette, Joe Williams, George Allen, V.W. Bonnel, Raymond Bannon, Martin Bannon, George Lesage, Fred Lesage, Glen Lesage, Norman Blais, Mose Pelletier, Henry Roach, Dave Kimble, Joseph Kimble, Neil McCoy, Milton McCoy, Maurice Singleton, Frank Soloman, Donald MacLaurin, Paul Bannon, Paul Legarde, Andrew Legarde, Gordon Legarde, Norman Bouchie, Leonard Bouchie, Thomas Bouchie, Martin Ward, George Bourdeau, Daniel Dick, Xavier Michon and Henry Michon. We shall remember them.

0920

This bill is an important step in continuing to recognize the contributions of Indigenous veterans, as well as the contributions of cadets across Ontario. In a few weeks' time, all of us will gather, perhaps in person, perhaps remotely, at our Remembrance Day ceremonies. We will gather to honour all our fallen and surviving veterans.

This year, Murray Whetung and all Indigenous veterans, those who are still with us and those who have passed, will be on my mind. I would like now to salute all of Canada's veterans and thank them for their service.

Thank you to the member opposite for bringing forward this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I am proud to speak in favour of this private member's bill. The residents of Barrie-Innisfil are served by three cadet units: the Grey and Simcoe Foresters Royal Canadian Army Cadet unit, the number 53 Barrie Royal Canadian Sea Cadets Corps and the Barrie Silver Fox Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron. The three units are based out of Barrie's armoury, which is located next to Barrie's Queen's Park. I'm very delighted to be able to speak at this Queen's Park in support of Bill 220, the Murray Whetung Community Service Award Act, 2020, introduced by my colleague the member for Peterborough-Kawartha.

The cadet movement has a long history, as we've heard. In fact, the movement predates Confederation. During the US Civil War, and in response to the Fenian raids, drill associations were formed in Canada. These associations

were open to those over 13 years of age and served to train militia—the precursors, of course, of our Canadian Armed Forces.

In the city of Barrie, an army cadet corps was formed in 1899 at Barrie Central Collegiate, my alma mater. In 1940, a sea cadet corps and an air cadet squadron were established in Barrie. The cadets have come a long way since the 1800s. The cadets of today are now learning citizenship, volunteerism and leadership.

The hundreds of cadets in the air, sea and army cadets represent the city of Barrie every year at the town of Innisfil and many other parts of Simcoe county. In years past, they have been on hand at various Remembrance Day ceremonies and commemorations of important anniversaries. I see them at the Barrie Legion and the Lefroy and Belle Ewart Legion; I see them at the Barrie Cenotaph and Barrie's military park; I see them at the cenotaph in Cookstown, at Innisfil's town hall; and I see them at Sandycove Acres retirement community. Every year, these cadets are present at a luncheon at Superior Home Health Care, which is held at Mapleview Community Church.

I'd like to say, as I always say, that you're never too young to make a difference. These cadets showing up to all these events certainly prove it. Seeing them interacting with World War II veterans and the generation before them, seeing them interact with seniors and veterans is a magical experience. You can see how much they love what they're doing as sea cadets. You can see how much the World War II veterans love interacting with them. They learn from one another. They show that they're active in their community and that they remember.

Speaker, I fully support the bill and the fact that it is very aptly named after Murray Whetung. I've read much about him and I now understand why the member for Peterborough–Kawartha has named it after such a deserving individual. It's a great way to pay tribute to him.

The bill prescribes that the award will be awarded to a cadet that demonstrates exceptional citizenship and volunteerism within their community. Based on the cadets that I know, and I know many of us know, I know it will be very tough to find only a small handful of individuals every year. So I want to thank my colleague from Peterborough–Kawartha for introducing this bill, I want to thank the brave men and women for everything they have done and, of course, Murray Whetung for his tremendous legacy, and a big thank you to his family for holding it up.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Bonjour. C'est toujours un plaisir de me lever dans cette Chambre, et je suis très honoré de parler aujourd'hui de M. Murray Whetung.

The bill, the Murray Whetung Community Service Award Act, 2020, as introduced by the member for Peterborough–Kawartha, seeks to create a yearly award for young cadets in the Royal Canadian Air Cadets Corps, the Royal Canadian Army Cadets Corps and the Royal Canadian Sea Cadets Corps in Ontario, and will be named after Chief Whetung, or "Chief," as he is known in Curve

Lake First Nation #35, of the Anishinaabe of the great Ojibway nation.

New Democrats—as I am sure that our opposition critic for veterans affairs, the member for St. Catharines, would agree—are always pleased to support cadet programs and awards. Les programmes des cadets sont exceptionnels. Ils visent à développer des qualités de leadership, de citoyenneté et de communauté.

I am pleased to have met on multiple occasions with the Local 1635 Kapuskasing Army Cadets in my riding of Mushkegowuk–Baie James. They are truly a fantastic group of youth, with incredible values and a sense of community-building that I have never faced before, such as Alain Trottier's daughter Elizabeth, who is now in university.

But again, I am pleased to be able to speak to this bill named after Murray Whetung, who will be 99 and who is a veteran of World War II. There are multiple reasons to praise Chief Whetung; there is no question about that. Mr. Whetung, I dare say, is a quintessential example of human strength and resilience that has been documented in a number of ways. As an Ojibway in Curve Lake, life was not easy for him and for his family, all the way to building communication lines in Europe in the middle of World War II.

Mr. Whetung was an electrical worker at the local GM factory in Peterborough who had tried to enlist into the air force, but they weren't taking any more recruits. Finally, he was taken by the army in November 1942, where he trained as a signalman. By early 1943, he took off from Halifax towards the United Kingdom, où il a suivi l'entraînement et travaillé dans les communications entre les lignes. Il est ensuite parti pour la France en 1944. Mr. Whetung was part of the communications group that built lines from Juno Beach and beyond. Importantly, Mr. Whetung is among the 3,000 First Nations who volunteered to serve during World War II.

Aussi, ça me fait penser à M. Wesley de Constance Lake, qui est un autre leader qui prend soin des « young Rangers », les jeunes rangers dans la communauté qui vont aider la communauté dans les temps difficiles, puis qui leur donne tellement de bonnes valeurs—tellement de bonnes valeurs.

Je pense que c'est le député qui l'a dit dans son discours : ce sont des héros. Ce sont des héros de la Deuxième Guerre. Ce sont des héros qui montrent tellement de bonnes valeurs à notre jeunesse. Des fois, on voit que ça nous en prend plus. La jeunesse a besoin de personnes qui peuvent leur passer ces valeurs-là, qui peuvent les emmener à aider leur communauté.

Tu sais, les Premières Nations aussi, quand ça arrive aux « elders », ces personnes dans les communautés sont très importantes. Puis, de valeur pour eux autres c'est d'aider, puis aussi de les écouter. On semble oublier que des fois—puis ça, c'est une des affaires qu'on fait dans notre culture. Ils ont tellement de richesses, ils ont tellement à apporter à notre société, mais on a la semblance de les mettre de côté.

Puis, les Premières Nations, elles valorisent leurs personnes âgées, ou ce qu'elles appellent leurs « elders »,

pour ce qu'ils ont vécu. Ils ont du vécu, et puis ils nous apportent tellement. Puis de passer ça, comme le Chief Whetung a fait, à la jeunesse, d'apporter des valeurs dont tout le monde peut bénéficier, c'est tout à son honneur.

C'est pour ça qu'on appuie le projet de loi. C'est pour ça que je remercie le député d'avoir apporté ce beau projet de loi pour reconnaître le Chief Whetung puis reconnaître aussi les cadets, la jeunesse qui amène tellement de bonne valeur à notre communauté et à notre province.

0930

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Certainly, I'm proud to be joining my colleagues here who are in support of Bill 220, the Murray Whetung Community Service Award Act, 2020, brought forward by the fine member for Peterborough–Kawartha. I know he is committed. He is knowledgeable on this file. This is something that obviously crosses party lines so that it is certainly not a partisan issue, but a matter of identity, really, of what we are as a nation; because he has recognized that strong citizenship, discipline and commitment to our province and our country does come, on many, many occasions, in the army, air and sea cadets.

There was a time in my younger years when, in my own hometown in Madoc, cadets were an overwhelming force for good. We only had maybe 400 students in the high school, yet we had 150, both young men and women, serving in our local cadet corps. We were a dominant organization. We were part of the No. 385, Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment, working out of Belleville—the historic Hasty Ps who served, of course, so well through the Italian campaign in the Second World War.

We learned a lot during all of those times with that affiliation. In parades alone, when we were going through all of our small municipalities, sometimes it would take over a block for our regiment to be able to walk by in that parade. When you only have a community of maybe 1,000 or 2,000 people, we were not only very dominant, but a recognition that this was a commitment to the community.

Cadets were not just in my backyard. They were a major part of the local communities and the culture and community spirit in Napanee, Bancroft and Bath, just to name a few of the others. In all the corners of these two counties, Denbigh to Odessa to Lake St. Peter, the young people in these cadet corps learned many, many things about their lives to come. It wasn't just simply a matter of going and standing on parade; they learned the importance of service to their neighbours and their neighbourhoods at a time that hasn't even gone, even though the times change. These are dedicated young men and women in our communities from all backgrounds who exemplify the finest in Canadian citizenship, in my mind, by volunteering with distinction to keep our communities safe and strong.

The Murray Whetung Community Service Award Act recognizes the special role of cadets and, of course, very importantly, their mentors; and, wonderfully, it recognizes Murray Whetung for his lifetime of service to the community and to the people of Ontario.

Now, the wording in this bill, which applies equally to air, sea and army cadets, is especially well considered: cadets, it says, “selected by their corps for demonstrating exceptional citizenship and volunteerism within their community and their corps.” Powerful words, Madam Speaker, for powerful actions: “exceptional citizenship and volunteerism within their community,” selected by their corps. Undoubtedly, this is the cream of our youth, and they are being chosen by their peers, not by outsiders.

I look forward to the annual award ceremonies, when once again members here are able to have wide-open events, hopefully, to be able to participate with our young people. But until then, we know that cadets' citizenship and civic volunteerism will continue to serve our communities and our youth very well. Both our young and the local fabric of our communities, large and small, gain so much from all their efforts.

Obviously, I'm pleased to be able to hear the words from across the aisle—here, as well, from every member in the House. These young people are a prime example of what our future is and can be. Thank you to the member of Peterborough–Kawartha for the dedication he has shown in bringing this forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm pleased to be able to speak in support of the bill. As we approach Remembrance Day, it is not only important to remember the selfless sacrifice of our veterans overseas, and those who still serve; it's also important to remember their legacies of community work after they return.

Speaker, Murray was not only a veteran but a pillar of his community. He was a true example of the cadets' values of patriotism, sacrifice and volunteerism. By naming this award after him, we are also recognizing how transformative acts of service can be to one's community.

Service is just one of the many core principles taught in the cadet corps. It's also one of the values passed on to each and every young cadet. The cadet corps brings together people of all ages and backgrounds. It's an opportunity to teach Canadian values, history and traditions, along with new skills, providing unique experiences and promoting an active lifestyle with friendship. This bill will not only shine a light on the young individuals who are doing marvelous things in our community, but it would also shine a light on this historic and valued institution.

Speaker, my hope is that this bill will inspire our young people to be more like Murray, including the cadet corps in the region of Durham, the sea cadets, air cadets and the army cadets; to teach young people that all good deeds do eventually come to light; that a lifetime of serving your community, province or country, like Murray, is not a chore but an honourable pursuit; and the proud legacy that he has left and continues to live, and is an example of how life should be led.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Back to the member for Peterborough–Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: I'd like to thank the members from Thunder Bay–Atikokan, Barrie–Innisfil, Mushkegowuk–

Baie James, Hastings–Lennox and Addington and Whitby for their comments.

When I was doing the research on this, it was really interesting talking to so many people about it. Very few people actually knew that somebody who was a First Nation individual who served for more than four years lost their status. I worked very closely with Lieutenant Colonel Barry Leonard, who is the commanding officer for cadets in Ontario. He's a lifelong member of the Royal Canadian Air Force, and he wasn't aware of it. So he thanked me for bringing that forward.

As we went through our discussions on this bill, one of the things that he said was that in the cadets, they have a lot of awards for cumulative action over your term, but there are few awards that junior cadets have the opportunity to win. This is an award that is not cumulative over your career in cadets; it's what you do each year. It's opened up, then, not just to the NCOs, but to all of those junior cadets. He believed that this would a great way to inspire these young leaders to give back, and to continually give back. Lieutenant Colonel Leonard's personal opinion on it was that this is something that would keep people engaged. It would demonstrate to the greater community—not just cadets, but the greater community—that it's a good idea to give back to your community.

I truly hope that today we'll be able to pass this and that I'll be able to take it to committee and eventually get this to be an award that is established and given out on a yearly basis.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Mr. Smith has moved second reading of Bill 220, An Act to provide for an award for exceptional cadets. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Pursuant to standing order 101(i), the bill is referred to the Committee of the Whole House.

The member for Peterborough–Kawartha?

Mr. Dave Smith: I'd like to refer it to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills, please.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Is the majority in favour of the bill being referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills? Agreed. The bill is referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

Orders of the day?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): There being no further business, this House stands recessed until 10:15.

The House recessed from 0939 to 1015.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Jamie West: The story of government support, or lack of support, for the autism community in Ontario has

not been pretty. As far back as 2005, the autism community has been protesting the Liberal government, and although the Conservatives promised 1,000% support for autism families, it has been two years and four months since the provincial election. There is really not much the Premier can brag about, and it gets worse. Last December, they re-postponed the implementation of a new autism program until April 2021, which is perhaps the cruelest April Fools' joke of all.

This month, I had a virtual town hall to discuss autism in northern Ontario, and I was joined by three guests. Sylvie Grenier is a bilingual board-certified assistant behaviour analyst, and she spoke about the unique needs of the north and the difficulty assessing services. Shannon Lavoie's youngest child, Theo, was diagnosed with autism three years ago; she spoke about the difficulty accessing francophone services in Ontario. And Shannon Ketchabaw spoke about her son Todd. Todd is nine years old, he's non-verbal, and Shannon spoke about the cost to travel to access services for autism families, and how it disadvantages them both in terms of time and in finances.

The autism community in Sudbury and right across Ontario is relentless. They will never quit fighting for what is right and what is fair, and as New Democrats, we'll always be in their corner fighting right alongside with them.

MUSKOKA WATERSHED ADVISORY GROUP

Mr. Norman Miller: I rise today to thank the members of the Muskoka Watershed Advisory Group for their hard work over the past years and for the report they delivered to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. I've spoken to a number of the members of the group, and I know they worked very hard on this report. I want them to know I've read the report and will be talking to my colleagues about how we can implement the recommendations.

Of course, after the flooding in 2019, a large part of the report was focused on watershed management and flood mitigation. I ask that the Minister of Natural Resources work with the Minister of the Environment to implement some of these recommendations. There are too many recommendations to mention them all, but a few I found interesting were about reducing road salt in our lakes, studying and mapping shoreline erosion, dredging the Muskoka River mouth and researching the causes of algae blooms. I also was pleased to see recommendations to expand the ash program by Friends of the Muskoka Watershed. This program uses ash to address a calcium deficiency in the soil to help trees grow.

The committee members are a mix of business people, scientists and environmentally minded residents who brought a lot of different perspectives to the table. Again, I want to thank all the members of the group: Chair Mardi Witzel, Vice-Chair Don Smith, Patricia Arney, John Beaucage, Julie Cayley, Chris Cragg, John Miller, Kevin Trimble and Dr. Norman Yan.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Today I rise on behalf of front-line workers in long-term-care homes in London–Fanshawe and across Ontario. In the midst of a pandemic, they have been left to manage the impossible situation largely on their own.

Time and time again, I hear from staff who have reached out to me exhausted and utterly drained at the soul-crushing pace of their workplaces. They tell me they're tired of not having their cries for help heard. They wish they could do more but there isn't enough time or energy or resources. They've been betrayed by successive governments who chose to incrementally dismantle the long-term-care system, rather than build it to meet the growing and urgent need of Ontarians.

By legislating a minimum of 4.1 hours of direct care per resident per day, my bill, the Time to Care Act, is a practical, effective and immediate solution that would vastly improve the lives of those who work and live in long-term care. Even the government's long-term-care commission interim report recommends the implementation of four hours of hands-on care.

On Wednesday, the Time to Care Act will be debated and voted on in this Legislature. The time for reading reports and commissioning studies is over. The time to come up with a strategy is over. The time to stall is over. Residents in long-term-care homes are dying. The time for long-term care to pass my Bill 13 is here now. Will the government do that?

1020

MULTICULTURALISM

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I truly believe that much of what makes Ontario a wonderful place to live and do business is the diversity and multicultural character of our province. People from all walks of life, backgrounds and cultures call Ontario home. That is why it is so important to commemorate and celebrate our diversity.

Mr. Speaker, during the month of October we recognize both Islamic and Hispanic heritage months to provide Ontarians of all backgrounds the opportunity to learn about these rich and vibrant communities. For generations, the Islamic and Latin American communities have made significant contributions to our social, economic, political and cultural fabric.

In my riding, Markham–Thornhill, the Islamic Society of Markham and Denison mosque have gone above and beyond to help the community during COVID-19, including food and PPE donations and serving as a hub for community charitable work. This could also be said of the many Hispanic organizations across the GTA, such as Fuerza Latina Community Services, a leader in youth empowerment,

Mr. Speaker, I hope everyone takes this opportunity to celebrate Islamic and Hispanic heritage and recognize the important contributions they've made in making Ontario the great province that it is.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. John Vanthof: Today I'd like to update the House on the circumstances facing Finn Sirois from Timmins, Elijah Hennessey from Algoma–Manitoulin and Jeremy Hetu in our riding. Those are three young children who have different circumstances, but they share one thing in common: They need formula to stay alive. It's the only thing that keeps them alive. In Ontario, that formula isn't covered by OHIP.

We've spoken to the minister many times. The member from Algoma–Manitoulin has brought this forward—and the member from Timmins–James Bay, the member from Nickel Belt. We continually bring this forward. I do it with special urgency today. We talked to Jeremy's mom this morning. When their money runs out, Jeremy has to go back to the hospital, because in the hospital it is covered. He's a medically fragile child. If a decision is not made positively, he is going back to the hospital where the formula is covered, plus all the hospital costs. He has gotten special emergency funding from ODSP for one week. Can you imagine wondering, week to week, if your medically fragile child is going to be able to be home the week after?

I urge the minister to step in and actually fix this problem and allow these people to stay home where they should be with their families.

ORLÉANS BENGALS FOOTBALL CLUB

Mr. Stephen Blais: I want to commend the Orléans Bengals football club who have cared for our kids inside and outside the white lines for many years.

Recently, in Russell, Ontario, just outside Orléans, a young Black youth was bullied and attacked because of the colour of his skin. When organization president Qasim Khan, Chilli Johnson, and Vic and Charmaine Tedondo heard about the story, they leapt to action by meeting with the family and providing free team fees and camps in order to show this young man that he will never be alone.

Under the leadership of Tammy Copp, the organization's principles to make football inclusive for all people are constantly on display. Tammy's leadership has created activities to drive inclusion on and off the football field for members of all gender identities and orientations. The Bengals also believe that no child should be left behind. That's why George Zigoumis created the Aldège Bellefeuille bursary, so kids of any income can participate. In 2009, the efforts of the Orléans Bengals to stamp out bullying were recognized when the club won the prestigious Royal Ottawa Inspiration Award for its Be a Bengal, Not a Bully program.

Mr. Speaker, these are but a few of the examples over the last decade where the Orléans Bengals have gone above and beyond the standard of simply fielding teams and decided to join the fight against bullying, racism and prejudices. The Bengals have stepped up. I want to thank everyone who dons the black and orange for volunteering to make our community a better place.

DISCRIMINATION

Mr. Vincent Ke: Since the beginning of the pandemic, there is a really disturbing trend that calls for our attention and action. According to a recent online survey of 500 Chinese Canadians conducted by the Angus Reid Institute, 43% of Chinese Canadians—and 44% out of them were born in Canada—have been the target of threats, insults and intimidation during the pandemic.

Unfairly blamed and shamed for COVID-19, about 30% of Chinese Canadians express that they often feel like others view them as a threat to their health and safety. They also report being victims of racist graffiti and offensive messages on social media platforms. As well, the survey revealed that 60% of Chinese Canadians feel anxious and change their daily habits to avoid unpleasant situations, and they worry that their children will be victims of bullying at school.

Mr. Speaker, I call for action against all racism, building a true, inclusive Canada. Although cowardly acts of racism target individuals or a specific group, the harmful impact on our society and culture hurts us all.

TASTE OF BRAMPTON

Mr. Kevin Yarde: It's an honour to rise and speak about this member statement regarding my community.

This pandemic has been really tough on all of us, but in recent months, it has been particularly tough for small business owners, especially in the hardest-hit sectors, like restaurant owners. One way I have been proud to show my support for the restaurant industry is by participating in the Taste of Brampton. What is the Taste of Brampton? The Taste of Brampton is an annual culinary event hosted by the Downtown Brampton BIA and local businesses. The Taste showcases the unique eats in Brampton through prix-fixe menus and special offerings exclusively available from October 15 until the 29th.

The Taste of Brampton will be focusing on takeout and outdoor dining on patios due to Peel region having a 28-day indoor dining restriction. Twenty-plus participants will be involved in the Taste of Brampton.

The businesses of Brampton welcome you to try their latest and greatest dishes during the Taste. Some of the participating restaurants are Mi Churros in downtown Brampton. They have the following promotions: three churros and coffee for \$4 and 10 baby churros with coffee for \$4.50. I know we're all getting hungry just listening to it.

Together, Mr. Speaker, we can all make a huge difference. As part of our NDP Save Main Street plan, there must be a goal of keeping restaurant jobs afloat by limiting food delivery fees. Our restaurants need support—real support—not photo ops of MPPs ordering takeout.

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I rise today to say a few words about what our government is doing despite the pandemic. Yes, government does continue in 2020, looking clearly

forward to the future of the province and the needs of its people. Today, I want to speak specifically about hospitals, schools and long-term care. In each of these important areas, our investments continue despite the pandemic.

Our commitment to thousands of new long-term-care beds began with construction and reconstruction back in 2018 and has continued province-wide after neglect that sadly had lasted for more than a decade.

New hospital announcements continue, such as the one last Friday in Picton, a wonderful town that I was privileged to represent as a federal member for almost 12 years. This new hospital is certainly needed, and our government is proceeding with it. Thanks to all of the people who worked so hard to get that.

In my riding of Hastings–Lennox and Addington, we recently cut the ribbon on a replacement bridge over the Skootamatta River, north of Tweed, and last week announced a brand new primary school, with child care, for Amherstview, a growing community in the eastern part of our province.

Mr. Speaker, this is real infrastructure. This is not just talking about something and not doing it; this is actually doing things. This is not pie-in-the-sky infrastructure or money-wasting turbines that ruined our vista, that harm our residents and cost everyone more money on their electricity bills. The Green Energy Act was a disaster. Our infrastructure program is delivering results. It's about getting Ontario out of the ditch and back on track.

SCHOOL BUS SAFETY

Mr. Mike Harris: Last week, from October 19 to 23, was National School Bus Safety Week. Every day, 800,000 students across the province rely on school buses to get them to and from the classroom. In Waterloo region, almost 30,000 students take a school vehicle, including my son who uses the bus to get to his middle school every day.

1030

Nothing is more important than our children, and I, along with my government colleagues the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Education, are committed to enhancing school bus safety. Within our first year as government, we made regulatory changes that allowed stop-arm camera technology to be used as evidence to hold drivers accountable.

But did you know, Speaker, that Ontario is the only province in Canada that doesn't use a dual-lamp amber-and-red-light warning system? This system would make our buses even safer. At a traffic light, drivers already know to stop when it's red and to be cautious when it's amber. This would be the same approach they would use with a school bus. School bus drivers would flash the amber lights to give drivers clear advanced notice that they will soon be stopping, and the red lights would come on when this bus is stopped and children are getting on and off.

A Transport Canada study found that the amber-and-red system reduced the speed of oncoming vehicles and prevented more drivers from passing a stopped school bus.

I wholeheartedly support this, and I am looking forward to introducing a private member's bill to make this change. Anything we can do to keep our children safer is worth doing, and I hope my colleagues will support that.

RESPIRATORY THERAPY WEEK

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I've been advised that the Minister of Health may have a point of order.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Point of order: I would like to call to the attention of all members that this week is Respiratory Therapy Week. I ask this House to join me in recognizing all the hard work that respiratory therapists are doing across the province to help our patients, especially now during COVID. Thank you very much, all respiratory therapists, for your tireless work.

QUESTION PERIOD

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question this morning is to the Premier. On Friday, the government's long-term-care commission confirmed what front-line staff and families of residents have been crying out for months. I'm going to quote from that report: "Long-term-care homes were forgotten in the initial provincial plans to control the spread of COVID-19 until residents started dying."

Just last week, the Ford government's Minister of Long-Term Care was still insisting that the government had acted immediately and done all it could. No one on that side of the House, not the minister, not the Premier, is prepared to take any responsibility for the disasters that have unfolded in long-term care. Will the Premier finally do the right thing and ask his Minister of Long-Term Care to resign?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Long-Term Care to Reply.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: I reject the premise in your statement. I have been a doctor, a family physician, for decades. I came to politics because of issues surrounding long-term care that I knew both professionally and personally. I want to thank the commissioners for their report, this early report, to help us with guidance and to create transparency for the public. This is a very important commission that is non-partisan, it is independent, it is transparent and it is publicly facing, and I appreciate it hearing from all of the groups that want to be heard on this.

Our government has worked relentlessly with a commitment like no other government in the history of this province for long-term care. After it was—thank you, Speaker.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I think it's pretty disgraceful that the minister is pretending that there is nothing in this

report that is problematic. The report says clearly that the government didn't plan to protect seniors in long-term care when COVID-19 was hitting our province. That's a shameful thing to have happen, and somebody needs to take responsibility for it.

The report only confirms what residents have been saying and what family members have been saying for months; in fact, for years. On Friday, CBC's Marketplace revealed that there are routine abuse and violations that occur in most homes across the province and there are virtually no consequences—no consequences—when those homes break the law repeatedly. Sadly, this situation of neglect and abuse has become the norm in long-term care—completely unacceptable.

If what happened in long-term care with COVID happened anywhere else, the minister responsible would be offering her resignation. Why has the Premier failed to do the right thing and ask for that minister's resignation?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for the question. We look at the neglect for decades by the previous government and supported by the opposition right here today. When you had the opportunity to deal with the deep, deep issues, the systemic issues in long-term care, you did not take them.

Our government is the government that is committed to repairing, rebuilding and advancing long-term care, and I am the minister who cares so deeply about long-term care that I have come, after many years of serving the public, caring every day about patients and families and doing my very best to serve them, and now I'm here serving Ontarians. I will continue to be relentless, working with other ministries, working across governments, and I would hope that you would be part of the solution in such an unprecedented situation. I will be relentless.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. I will remind all members to make their comments through the Chair.

Start the clock. Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, what the minister hasn't figured out is this is not about her—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The member for Northumberland–Peterborough South, come to order.

I'll give you extra time. The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's not about her, it's about what happened in long-term care, and if there was that much neglect, she should have known and should have protected long-term-care homes from COVID-19. She should have protected those residents. She shamefully admits that she knew the system was a mess, and yet they forgot to plan, forgot to plan for protecting seniors in long-term care.

Families, residents, front-line staff in long-term-care homes were not surprised by the commissioner's report. These are the same issues that they continue to plead with the government and they were pleading with the government for months and even years to try to fix.

Friday's commission report really did feel compelled to tell the minister to actually take her study that she

commissioned and received back in July off the shelf and start implementing it. Stop studying the study, for goodness' sake. Get some things done.

No one's accountable, nothing is changing at all for people, and so the Premier now has to actually do the right thing, and if she will not resign, if she will not do the right thing and resign, the Premier of Ontario needs to fire his Minister of Long-Term Care.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock again. The Minister of Labour must come to order.

Start the clock. The Minister of Long-Term Care to respond.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for the question. I would suggest to the member opposite, please don't make it about me. I want it to be about Ontarians, and so if you continue in the proper process of why we are here, it is about serving Ontarians. It is about repairing, rebuilding and advancing long-term care, and the actions that we've taken speak for themselves, starting very early: the Ministry of Health lead on the preparedness plan, making sure that all across the sector, there was integration; a group of experts, not only in Public Health Ontario, but Ontario Health; all the expertise, whether it's in testing, virology, many, many experts informing this plan.

I agree with you: This is about Ontarians, it's about serving the people, and it is not about me. The unprecedented issue that we've seen with COVID across the world, looking at asymptomatic spread, is something that the world has never seen before. So now our government is—

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

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier.

Yesterday, Ontario achieved a troubling new milestone as the total daily case counts of COVID-19 soared to a record high. It's clear now that the failure of the Ford government's plan to deal with the upcoming second wave which we're now in and make the necessary investments in things like testing capacity, smaller class sizes, staffing and long-term care is having a devastating effect.

Weeks ago, the Premier claimed Ontario was flattening the curve and hitting a plateau, and now he has to answer the question: Is he prepared, finally, to admit that his government's plan for the second wave has fallen tragically, tragically short?

1040

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: We took steps very early on to prepare for the fall. Our fall preparedness plan, Keeping Ontarians Safe, with six key pillars—and we've also put \$2.8 billion into this plan across the board—making sure that we can respond to surges within our hospitals and public health facilities, making sure we have the strongest flu campaign in Ontario's history, making sure that we

have the health human resources we need to make sure that we can have the people we need working in our long-term-care sector and in our hospitals. We've been preparing for this; we are ready for it.

We've already taken steps in four key areas with modified stage 2. We are looking to see the results. There is a problem in the sense that it was Thanksgiving festivities that happened about the same time as we cut back in a modified stage 2 in four areas. We still have to wait to see the effects of those provisions, but we are seeing the numbers starting to go down in certain areas. The total numbers are still troubling, but we are starting to see some of the numbers go down.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, all summer long, the Premier simply ignored experts who were pleading for the government to protect kids in classrooms, seniors in long-term care, and to upgrade our chronically under-resourced lab system.

Instead, he's offered direction that is so inconsistent and so unclear that even his own MPPs are publicly calling for clarity. This weekend, two government MPPs wrote the Premier warning that people may start ignoring public health advice. And the member for Niagara West, as we all saw, literally posed for a photo where he violated public health guidelines with over 40 of his friends and family.

Why is the Premier's own team challenging and outright ignoring his directions?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Of course, nothing could be further from the truth.

The member opposite will know that the members for Milton and Burlington were responding to a challenge that is happening in Halton where the elected officials there currently disagree with their chief medical officer of health on if and when stage 2 should come into effect in Halton. Mr. Speaker, of course we would expect that our members would attempt to intervene when there are those types of disagreements. They did the right thing in reaching out to Dr. Williams. I would suspect and I would hope that members opposite would do the exact same thing when their municipalities find themselves in the same situation.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I withdraw.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, people have been let down. That's the truth. People have been let down by this government's refusal to prepare properly for the second wave. They've been stuck in long lines, left waiting for test results. They've seen jobs disappear and businesses close. They've lost loved ones in long-term care.

The Premier is focused on saving money. He was focused on saving money when he should have been

focused on saving lives. And now his own MPPs are questioning him or outright ignoring health advice.

Is the Premier now prepared to admit that his government's planning for the second wave of COVID-19 was, tragically, a disaster?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, Mr. Speaker, as I just said, the members for Burlington and Milton—the member for Oakville North–Burlington also—have some concerns with respect to the fact that in Halton, there is a disagreement between elected officials and the Halton chief medical officer of health with entering stage 2. As a result, the members sought clarity from the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health, as I would hope that all members would do in instances where there is a clear difference of opinion.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to COVID-19 measures—look, this government, we're very proud of all of the work that we have done. We will continue to fight COVID-19 with all of the resources available to us, and by doing something extremely different than what the Leader of the Opposition would suggest: by working together with our friends in the municipal and Liberal and across party lines.

MEMBER'S CONDUCT

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Premier. With COVID cases peaking, it's vitally important that we all follow the rules. The Premier, in his daily press conferences, implores us, "Social distance. Wear masks. Don't let your kids come home for Thanksgiving." Ontarians across the province followed his advice. But now we see a picture from one of the Premier's own team with 40 people unmasked.

Could he please tell Ontarians why his own team doesn't follow his advice?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, thank you for that question. To be clear, the member in question has apologized for the lack of judgment in that instance. I've spoken with him, as has the Premier. We accept his apology, and of course, we encourage all members to do everything that they can to help us, to help Ontarians flatten the curve and defeat COVID-19.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again to the Premier: An apology is great, but we need to set an example. You need to set an example.

What's even more concerning is that the member from Niagara didn't seem to think that that was a problem. Are you really taking this seriously yourselves? It's a case of, "Do as I say, but not as I do," and it's not going unnoticed. Anthony Dale, CEO of the Ontario Hospital Association, said that the member should resign from his parliamentary assistant role. That would set an example.

Is the Premier willing to ask for his resignation?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, Mr. Speaker, what the member did was wrong. He apologized. The Premier and myself, we have both have spoken to him.

But when it comes to following the rules and, "Do as I say and not as I do," this is an opposition party that on day one, when we returned to this place after negotiating a cohort agreement, broke that agreement. When it comes to listening and doing all that we can, this is an opposition that within 10 hours of an agreement being reached on how to keep this Legislature going, on how to keep the business of the people being enacted, decided to ignore that, break the cohort and flood the chamber.

I would suggest to the member opposite: Take a good, long look in the mirror.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Timmins come to order. The Leader of the Opposition come to order. The member for Windsor West come to order. The member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas come to order.

The next question.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Stephen Crawford: My question is to the Associate Minister of Energy. The COVID pandemic has changed my constituents' lives dramatically by forcing them to work and to spend much more time at home. I know we froze the time-of-use electricity rates and introduced a COVID-19 recovery rate of 12.8 cents per kilowatt hour to help them through a very difficult time. But what happens next?

Could the minister please tell us what the government is doing to let Ontarians choose what is best for their families when it comes to electricity pricing?

Hon. Bill Walker: Thank you to the member from Oakville for his great work and a great question on behalf of his constituents.

Because of our decisive action this past summer, Ontarians benefited from stability and lower electricity bills. We knew, when homes became offices and classrooms, that the laundry machine and air conditioner would need to run more.

Ontarians have had no choice but to use more electricity. That's why it was critical for us to provide stability and predictability. Starting on November 1, electricity customers in this province will be able to choose a plan that best suits their household and lifestyle, with the option of choosing either time-of-use electricity rates or tiered pricing, which will provide a set rate for electricity up to a certain level of consumption.

Mr. Speaker, Ontarians deserve to choose what works best for them and their families, and our government will always look for ways to make life more affordable for the people we were given the privilege to serve.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the minister for that answer. I know that many of my constituents will

appreciate the option to be able to choose an electricity plan that works best for them.

Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 has changed the way people work right across this province. Some may be spending more time working at their homes, and other essential workers are spending much more time than ever at their workplaces. Can the minister please tell this House how the customer choice initiative considers all Ontarians, no matter what their work situation?

Hon. Bill Walker: Thank you, again. Through you, Mr. Speaker: The member from Oakville makes an important point. Ontarians consume electricity in different ways, and they all deserve the opportunity to save on their electricity costs.

Whether you work from home 9 to 5 or do shift work or work multiple part-time jobs, customers use electricity differently. If customers use more electricity during non-peak hours like evenings and weekends, time of use may be a better rate plan for them, but if customers use more electricity during weekday hours, tiered pricing could help them save. That's why we're offering both, Mr. Speaker: choice.

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Mr. Speaker, all that Ontarians need to do to take advantage of this program is to contact their local distribution system centre and they will be switched to the price structure of their choice. We're proud to offer stability and affordability when it comes to electricity for the people of Ontario.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Premier. This week, the government's long-term care commission echoed a long-standing call from New Democrats, front-line workers and residents in long-term care to establish a minimum standard of four hours per day of hands-on care per resident in every long-term-care home in this province.

This week, the Time to Care Act, which would establish this standard in law, is up for debate for the fourth time. There should be nothing left to debate. This is a long-overdue and simple measure that will protect seniors and improve their quality of life. Will the Premier support it?

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

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Once again, I want to thank the commissioners for their early response. This is something that we had been looking to the commission for, for early guidance, if possible, and so we are very appreciative of that.

Certainly we recognize the long-standing staffing issue in long-term care, the crisis that was leading into our government's situation when we took it on in 2019 in the summer as a new ministry, understanding what really had not been done by the previous government. Clearly, we take the safety and well-being of residents and staff in long-term care as a main priority. There is no doubt about the importance of their safety, the well-being and the high-

quality care that our residents need, and their complexity, understanding that our residents are more complex than ever before.

We understand the imperative of addressing the staffing issue, addressing the issues that are long-standing in long-term care, and we will continue to work towards improving care for our residents.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The tragic reality is that since Mike Harris eliminated the minimum standards of care over two decades ago, government after government has promised action and failed to deliver. The Liberals promised to re-establish the minimum standards in 2003. Before the last election, every Conservative in this Legislature voted to support this bill. The government's own staffing review and now their commission have called for this to be enacted urgently.

When will the government establish a minimum standard of four hours a day of hands-on care per resident in this province?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's question with respect to private member's business. We will be debating that, if I'm not mistaken, on Wednesday, when the House will give consideration of her bill.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Good morning. My question is for the Minister of Health. Over the weekend, the former employer of the Premier's chief of staff, the Toronto Sun tabloid, in an act of state propaganda, mischaracterized a letter signed by two government members as pushback against the Premier, when in fact it was written to the Chief Medical Officer of Health and not the Premier. It was another example of this government passing the buck.

Six weeks ago, during question period, I stood here and I asked the government for objective criteria and a framework. Why did the government refuse to publicly release transparent, objective criteria prior to shutting down businesses in four regions across Ontario?

Hon. Christine Elliott: We have been very transparent with the information that we have published with respect to why some of these areas were put into modified stage 2. It depends on a number of factors, including the number of cases, of course; the ability of our public health system to be able to deal with that in terms of contact tracing, testing, isolating and so on; the ability of our hospitals to be able to manage that excess capacity if we have an overrun of patients with COVID-19; and, of course, we consult with the medical officers of health in all of those areas. It's not just one person that makes this decision; it's Dr. Williams, it's the public health measures table, but it's also the medical officers of health in those particular areas. In the areas that are now in modified stage 2, the local

medical officers of health all agreed that this was necessary.

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: This government continues to pass the buck. In one breath, they say that they rely on medical experts and want the public to give them a pass on their botched use of emergency powers because they aren't doctors. In another breath, they threaten swift action and that they might "bring down the hammer."

But the chief medical officer only provides recommendations. The decisions are supposed to be made by the Premier and this government. Are they making the decisions or not? Because if they're not making the decisions and don't want any of the criticism, perhaps they should let the chief medical officer—who they like to blame—serve as first minister and Minister of Health.

I repeat: Is this government making the decisions or not?

Hon. Christine Elliott: In every case, all of our decisions have been made based on scientific evidence and clinical evidence. I'm not sure, Speaker—I'll ask the member through you—who she would like us to rely on to make these decisions.

We have to make decisions based on the scientific evidence, based on the recommendations by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, by the people on the health command table, by the people on the health measures table, by a number of doctors and physicians who have volunteered their time to serve, by the medical officers of health in all of the units. This isn't a single decision that's made by anybody; this is a decision that's made by political advisers, by all of us as politicians, based on the recommendations of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and all of the other people who are giving us recommendations.

That's what we should be basing the decisions on. That's what the people of Ontario expect us to be relying upon.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is to the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues. We've said in this House many times and even more outside of it that Ontario's child welfare system is broken. It's an outdated system, with only minimal changes through its over 125-year history.

While there have been some improvements, small changes aren't enough. Apprehension seems to be the first choice rather than assessing the family issue and providing the right supports. It's also clear that child welfare is so much more than just protecting children in the home.

Unfortunately, Speaker, the previous government, helped by the NDP, let this system suffer. Can the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues please confirm with the House that she won't keep the status quo, but will actually help children in need?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member from Whitby for that question. Speaker, no parent, no child, no family member should fear speaking to a children's aid

society or asking for help. Children and youth should not be removed from their cultures, religion, faith or communities. Poverty is not a reason to remove a child from a loving home.

The culture in Ontario's child welfare system needs to change, and that's exactly what we are doing. We are moving from apprehension to prevention. We are focusing on intervening early and providing supports to keep children and youth with their families and communities as best as we can. When they do need to be removed, we are prioritizing family-based care over group homes, and giving children and youth a stronger voice in the decisions about their care.

Speaker, we know that children and youth who maintain connections to mothers, fathers, family, community, faith or culture have better outcomes. That's our focus and that's what we're going to do.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Back to the minister: Thank you, Minister, for that response.

Speaker, the minister makes an important point: that children and youth who maintain connections to their mothers, fathers, faith, cultural communities have better outcomes. The impact child welfare has on individuals reaches far beyond the home. In its current state, those in contact with the system have worse life outcomes. Changes need to happen, and kids need a modern system that puts them and their families at the centre.

Can the minister commit to modernizing the child welfare system so that children and youth who have been left behind by the Liberals and the NDP will now have a chance at success?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you again to the member for raising this important question. The member is correct that child welfare is about so much more than just protection. It is about community. It is about family supports. It is about education and building a strong foundation for success.

I can say, yes, I can commit to changing the system for the children and youth and families in Ontario who need it. That's why I am working with my colleagues to create a better-integrated system, so that a woman fleeing violence doesn't have to worry about being separated from her kids; so that children who might have to be removed from their home are getting supports in school and don't fall behind; so that Indigenous children can remain in their communities and receive culturally appropriate care and stay with families.

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Speaker, redesigning the child welfare system won't happen overnight, but we can commit to the long-term work that is needed to achieve success and promote positive outcomes for children, youth and families. Future generations are depending on us.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: My question is for the Premier. Ontarians are not pleased to see that this Premier is

rewarding Charles McVety for his friendship and political support. Instead of focusing on helping Ontarians to get through this pandemic, the Premier is distracted, and he wants to let McVety grant arts and science degrees at his college.

Today, the National Council of Canadian Muslims called on the Premier to distance himself from this man and his bigotry and to reassess whether this government will proceed with schedule 2 of this legislation. And so I ask: Will the Premier listen to NCCM and all other Ontarians outraged by this decision to support Charles McVety's hateful views?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant.

Mr. David Piccini: I thank the member opposite for her question. Mr. Speaker, just to be clear, independent review of degree-granting has existed for decades under governments of all stripes. Factually, this institution has had the ability to grant degrees up to the PhD level under the previous government, and since the 1990s.

The reason we have a high quality of education in the province of Ontario is because parties of all stripes have supported the independent process and review of the post-secondary quality assessment board.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Back to the Premier: The Premier should not be doing political favours for his close friends and diehard supporters, people like Charles McVety. I've written to the Ontario Human Rights Commission and I've asked the Chief Commissioner to look into whether this bill is a violation of Ontario's Human Rights Code or Canada's Charter of Rights.

Given the long-standing track record of Charles McVety using this college as a platform for discrimination and harm against protected groups, and the concerns raised by NCCM among so many others, will the government do the right thing and pull this bill while the Chief Commissioner looks into the matter?

Mr. David Piccini: Again, just to be clear, enabling legislation for degree-granting has existed under governments of all stripes and it is reliant on the independent process of the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board. We look forward to the review, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is for the Premier. In March, this government announced their COVID-19 action plan, which was largely comprised of tax deferrals for businesses instead of the real help that they needed, like commercial rent relief. Just a few weeks ago, the Treasury Board president told us that he is planning to collect an astonishing 100% of those tax deferrals, despite businesses being closed, with no cash flow, and that we are now in a second-wave shutdown to slow the spread of COVID-19.

It is clear that the March action plan failed. It is clear that there was no plan for a second wave. The Premier was

taking a summer victory tour while Ontarians were waiting for back-to-school plans and lining up for hours to get a COVID test.

Speaker, will the Premier's budget include a real second-wave plan, not just deferred supports? Will the Premier make investments commensurate with the health crisis that we now face, and how will—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The parliamentary assistant to reply.

Mr. Stan Cho: To the member opposite, what the Premier was doing was touring this province and engaging with the small businesses throughout. These are mom-and-pop shops. Behind every single one of those closed doors is a family trying to provide for their loved ones during a very difficult time.

I reject the member saying that there has been no direct response. There has been, to the tune of \$11 billion. That's been tax cuts—employer health tax cuts to the tune of \$300 million; \$175 million to keep hydro rates low; \$300 million just announced for the regions that are affected by the revised stage 2. That's going to go to help with their fixed costs, whether that's hydro, whether that's those taxes that we spoke about, or even with property taxes.

So while the member opposite considers that consulting with those hard-working businesses of Ontario is a waste of time, we disagree, here on the government benches.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: As the PA lists these figures, and they claim that you're committing for support, the FAO points out that this government is sitting on \$9.3 billion in reserves and unallocated funds which could be invested in programs and supports for Ontarians, to keep them safe. In fact, you've fallen short on long-term care, on education, on small business—and, in fact, when you look at cutting off the emergency benefits that the most vulnerable Ontarians rely on in OW and ODSP income supports. Since March, as the PA knows, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs held hundreds of hours of hearings across industries and sectors, hearing testimonies and witnesses from restaurants to spas to tourism operators to tech hubs. In fact, we have this book of ideas that have been presented.

Why are we still waiting for the much-needed supports that have been called for? What are you waiting for—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The parliamentary assistant to reply.

Mr. Stan Cho: Certainly a lot to digest in that question, but I want to share with that member a lesson that my parents taught me when I was nine years old in our little convenience store in Rexdale, and that is: When times are good, you put away for a rainy day. That's what this government did in its first two years of its mandate. That's why we're able to provide that direct relief.

The member opposite mentions the FAO report, and I want to remind the member that the FAO's first-quarter report is a snapshot in time. It would be irresponsible of a prudent government to spend its entire year's budget in

that very short period of time. We are providing that direct support, and that's why we announced \$300 million for the revised stage 2. Those supports are going to continue, in a coordinated effort with our federal partners in Ottawa, to fill the gaps of this joint program that is released. That's why we will have these further support measures announced in that budget.

I look forward to continuing to assist the great, hard-working businesses of this province through the budget.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. The Minister of Labour will come to order. The member for Scarborough–Guildwood will come to order.

Restart the clock. The next question.

NORTHERN ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Norman Miller: My question is for the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines and Minister of Indigenous Affairs. We know this has been a challenging period for many of us, but small businesses, and particularly northern small businesses, have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through the Speaker to the minister: What is our government doing to support northern Ontario small businesses?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and through you I would like to thank the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka for his question. As we continue to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak and kick-start the economy in Ontario, we know that investing in businesses in northern Ontario will be critical for our long-term success. That's why we introduced the Northern Ontario Recovery Program to support hard-working businesses in northern Ontario that have been impacted by COVID-19.

In fact, the CEO from Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce said they're "very pleased to support the Northern Ontario Recovery Program.... Through many consultations with the governments of Canada and Ontario, it was evident that many small businesses were unintentionally falling through the cracks of support programs for a variety of reasons." The Northern Ontario Recovery Program "will help address that issue by supporting the many businesses that are investing in ensuring a safe environment for their employees and customers so that we can have a safe today and healthy tomorrow."

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

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you for that response. It's clear that our government is listening to the people of northern Ontario and stepping up to support them. Can the parliamentary assistant share more details of the Northern Ontario Recovery Program and the type of projects that it aims to support?

Mr. Dave Smith: Again, thank you for that question. The program is being administered through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. and will provide targeted

funding so businesses can install the necessary upgrades and adapt to the challenges that they have with COVID-19. Applications will be open until December 31, 2020, and companies can apply for assistance for things like building renovations or adding on new construction to support physical distancing and other safety measures; installing employee and customer safety installations, like Plexiglas shields, sneeze guards; equipment purchases, including PPE; and marketing for new business initiatives and restructuring of business operations so that they can thrive during this COVID-19 challenge.

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This has been a challenging period for many of us, but I know that with this investment, the resilience of northern Ontario will return from this crisis stronger and better than ever.

CAREGIVERS

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. On Friday, the Conservative government's own long-term-care commission recommended that, given the physical care and psychosocial support that caregivers provide, long-term-care residents must be provided consistent, safe access to family members and loved ones.

Speaker, I couldn't agree more. Since the first wave of the pandemic, families, experts and the official opposition NDP all sounded the alarm about the mental, physical and emotional suffering among isolated residents. It motivated me to table the More Than a Visitor Act, which this government supported but has not moved forward.

Will the government follow their own commission's recommendations and pass the More Than a Visitor Act to allow for safe, consistent, meaningful caregiver access?

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

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: That is exactly what we've done with the essential caregivers—the dedicated, the designated essential caregivers. Each resident is able to designate two care providers that will be allowed into the home. If there is an outbreak in the home, one caregiver will be allowed in. They will be trained in the appropriate, necessary equipment that they are required to use, the donning and the doffing, as we say: the putting on and the taking off of this equipment.

We recognize the absolute necessity to support the mental well-being of our residents in long-term care. It was a difficult decision early on to limit, but that was done through the Chief Medical Officer of Health to limit visitors into the home. Each resident—I want to reinforce this point—can designate two people to be their essential caregiver, to be allowed into the home, and one person, one caregiver, in the case of an outbreak. So even in the situation of an outbreak, these people will be allowed into the home.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: This government has a responsibility not only to keep people safe from COVID, but

from the harm of isolation as well. They're failing miserably on both fronts, and it's important that the minister listen to this so she knows the reality of what's going on, as opposed to what she wants to think is going on.

This weekend, Anne wrote to me. She said that she has been fully shut out of her mom's retirement home, even with no outbreak.

Joan also sent me an email, concerned about her husband who lives in long-term care. She said, "I don't want another six months of not seeing him due to spread. The situation needs to be improved now."

Speaker, I have hundreds of other emails exactly the same as this. Will the Premier fast-track the More Than a Visitor Act, and provide the staffing levels, PPE and training to actually facilitate and enforce safe access for caregivers?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: As I said, to the member opposite, this is a situation that already has been addressed. We will continue to take additional measures.

If you want to provide the names and the homes of which you speak, then I would be happy to take that back to the ministry to fully understand—

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: They copied you too.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Yes, I would be happy to address that.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

M^{me} Lucille Collard: My question is for the Minister of Education. This government has repeatedly mentioned the importance of providing mental health services in Ontario, especially in the middle of this crisis. To that effect, we need to be aware of the incredible pressure that education workers of all categories are going through, whether it's teachers, bus drivers, principals, administrative staff in schools and in school boards.

I was told that, right now, education workers of all kinds are feeling the exhaustion as if it was the end of November, with no relief in sight before the holiday season, which is a whole two months away.

My question on behalf of all these exhausted workers: What support is the minister offering for education workers that are working in these extremely challenging environments?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you for that question. As you know, the Roadmap to Wellness was established back in the early part of March. As a result of COVID, we had to look at finding resources that would help the children in the schools but also help the instructors. We invested in virtual care. We invested, initially, \$12 million and an additional \$14.75 million. We created help lines for students, Kids Help Phone. We established lines for the front-line workers and first responders. We created a network of supports in a difficult time when face-to-face services will not be easily provided.

In addition to that, we also ensured that in schools, there were additional resources invested and the additional

resources brought in—additional mental health care workers to assist the teachers in the work that needed to be done with the children.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Again to the Minister of Education on the same question: Education workers are working tirelessly and, for many, well beyond the normal hours to be responsive to public health requirements in addition to their workloads. There is added work and stress from having to react to a public health notice of an outbreak within very short time frames. I'm sure you're very well aware of what they need to do.

Another example for the secondary schools with the hybrid model is the fact that the school calendar has not been adjusted to provide teachers with any preparation time to prepare for the second quadmester. A consequence of this is also the cancellation of the exams, which gives no gap in between the first quadmester and the second, so they have to jump into the second subject with no time to prepare.

These workers are at a risk of burnout, and they need some breathing room. Will the minister work with all parties involved to give education workers and students some breathing room to protect their mental health, and supports to parents through this initiative and make sure that it is included in the budget?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to build on the message from the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. As the member opposite will know—and I appreciate the question, realizing full well the stress that the pandemic has imposed on our staff. These are people who work very hard, who have families themselves and I think who really are trying to do their very best in a very impossible circumstance.

That's the basis for why, in June, when we announced the Grants for Student Needs, we invested an additional \$15 million in mental health supports. Since then, we've announced \$30 million more to support mental health for children and likewise for staff. Boards have the latitude to utilize those funds to support staffing and to support the mental health resilience of our front-line workers.

Speaker, it's also why, in September, we funded a \$10-million allocation, the only province in Canada to mandate training for health and safety for COVID for permanent teachers as well as occasional supply teachers, as well as for mental health. We appreciate the impact that COVID has had on our front-line people and all Ontarians. We'll continue to be there for them, for our students and for all families in Ontario.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question this morning is for the Premier. Today, the Hamilton Spectator reported that Hamilton Health Sciences and St. Joseph's Healthcare are short 224 staff. In the middle of a pandemic, hospitals in my community are in dire need of nurses, lab technicians,

psychologists, PSWs. The list goes on and on, Mr. Speaker.

The workers on the front line of this pandemic need support. So my question: What is this government going to do to provide the relief to these hospitals that are so understaffed?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for the question. This is one of the key strategies in our fall preparedness plan, Keeping Ontarians Safe: having the health human resources that we need in order to deal with COVID-19. We have already put money into the nursing guarantee program for new nursing graduates. We've also given a temporary increase of pay until March 2021 for personal support workers and have also increased the salaries for the people who are working there, and bringing people back to provide them with benefits as well. We're very cognizant of the issues. We're in regular contact with the hospitals, as well as with the hospital association. We will make sure that the necessary staff will be there to serve the patients in your community.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Mr. Speaker, I find this answer disturbing, because these hospitals are understaffed right now. They need help now.

If that wasn't disturbing in its own right, we've also learned that as of October 15, 113 staff have tested positive for COVID-19. I would just like to add, the majority of these are women.

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Michele Leroux, the VP of human resources at Hamilton Health Sciences, had this to say: "The pandemic is taking a toll on our staff and physicians both at work and at home. Despite this, they continue to show up every day and simply go above and beyond to care for our community."

What is this government going to do today to ensure that these front-line workers get the support they need to stay healthy and to continue the fight against COVID-19?

Hon. Christine Elliott: We're all very grateful for the work that our front-line health care workers have done since the beginning of this pandemic. They have come to work each and every day. Physicians, nurses, PSWs, staff—everyone has come forward, and we are very grateful to them for doing that. We know that they need to be able to have the resources to stay safe themselves and to keep their families safe, because at the end of the day, they go home and they're concerned about passing on COVID-19 to their families. So we have provided them with the personal protective equipment that they need. We've increased the supplies dramatically. We've worked with Ontario companies that have come forward to produce some of the PPE as a sideline to their regular businesses. They've been preparing the gowns, the masks, the face shields, making sure that people have the supplies they need.

We've also made changes to allow for people to be moved around within hospitals. If there are some people

who aren't there because, unfortunately, they've become ill, we can move people from other parts of the hospital. We didn't have this ability before. This is a temporary measure, but—

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

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Mike Schreiner: My question is for the Premier.

Last week, when asked about the ongoing conflict at 1492 Land Back Lane, the Premier referred to Indigenous land defenders as "bad apples." He went on to suggest that he knew exactly what people in Indigenous communities wanted: broadband. There's no doubt we need better rural broadband, but if the Premier took the time to listen, he would know that Indigenous land defenders are talking about treaty rights and a resolution to outstanding land claims.

Speaker, I will acknowledge that I'm not in a position to speak for Indigenous land defenders, but I am in a position to ask the Premier if the government will agree to enter into land claims negotiations with the traditional Haudenosaunee confederacy chiefs and the Six Nations band council to seek a peaceful and respectful resolution.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Solicitor General to reply.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you for raising this important issue. The issue that is happening right now in Caledonia is deeply disturbing to many of us. We are now in the 98th day of, basically, a community that is in upheaval. I have great faith in the judicial system—when they made a ruling on Thursday. I have great faith in the OPP keeping that peace. But I will accept and respect your call.

I do believe that the federal government does have to step up and start having some true conversations about how to resolve these issues, because it is incredibly disruptive to the community, to the individuals who are protesting and ultimately to public safety.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the Solicitor General's response. I do agree that the federal government does have a role to play, but I believe the provincial government has a role to play as well.

This is not the only ongoing conflict that's happening. Right now, multiple First Nations are suing the government over Bill 197 and the fast-tracking of the environmental assessment process. Chief Solomon of the Mushkegowuk Council said, "Sadly, they're using COVID-19 as a decoy to restart the economy at the cost of the environment, the waters, the animals, our livelihood."

Speaker, First Nations across Ontario are raising serious concerns that their treaty rights are not being respected—their rightful and constitutionally guaranteed input on decisions about their land and resources.

So I would ask the Solicitor General: Will the government settle with First Nations around the environmental

assessment process rather than dragging this through the courts?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant to reply.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much for that question. Minister Rickford has formed a round table to add to the consultations with respect to this. He's brought in a number of the chiefs from Ontario to make sure that we have a fulsome consultation around Bill 197, and all of that information will be fed back to the rest of the ministry.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: To the Premier: The Ontario energy rebate is going to be removed for common areas of many condo and apartment buildings as of April 30 next year. That means that hydro bills for power used in those common areas will rise by over 30%. One condo in Toronto has calculated the impact on their residents would be \$140 per unit per year. Why, Premier, are you dramatically increasing the hydro bills for almost a third of condo owners and tenants in Ontario?

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

Hon. Bill Walker: Let's just start off answering this by saying that that government—that opposition party supported the Liberals to give us the highest energy rates ever in our history and the highest level of debt in our history. Our government is reversing the Liberal policies that created the hydro mess. We're stabilizing our electricity system and keeping electricity bills affordable through a 33.2% Ontario Electricity Rebate. Had we not done that, rates would have gone up an additional 30% under the watch of the Liberals and the NDP.

The Liberals spent 15 years adding billions of dollars to our electricity system by signing contracts for power we did not need and could not afford. We are rebuilding an affordable electricity system that prioritizes Ontario's electricity customers. In the meantime, Ontarians don't deserve to pay for the mistakes of the Liberals. That is why our government will continue to subsidize and ensure that we keep the bills as low as possible and support families and businesses of this great province.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The Premier promised to cut hydro rates by 12% in the last election. Since then, rates have gone up almost 4%, and many condo and apartment dwellers will be seeing big hikes in their hydro bills next April. Why did the Premier break his promise and why is he gouging so many apartment and condo dwellers?

Hon. Bill Walker: As I said in my last response, we cannot fix 15 years of mismanagement by the Liberals, supported fully by the NDP in opposition, overnight. But please be assured, we are working on this. If we continued down the Liberal path, as I said earlier: 30% more on those hydro bills. Is that what you want to support, 30% more of your first error? I don't think so.

Ontarians paid \$37 billion extra for electricity from 2006 to 2014, says Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk. We are doing what we can to ensure that we keep those bills affordable, that we keep those bills for business and seniors and people across our province as low as possible. We will not forget that the Liberals and the NDP caused the mess that we're currently trying to fix and ensure, again, affordability, reliability and a system we can be proud of.

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Mrs. Robin Martin: My question is for the Associate Minister of Transportation. Last week, the government brought forward the Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act. Now is not the time to delay delivery of priority infrastructure projects, including public transit and highway projects; it is the time to accelerate the building of key infrastructure projects to create jobs and build a strong foundation for a strong economic recovery.

Can the associate minister please advise us whether this bill will commit to accelerating, rebuilding and growth in this province?

Hon. Kinga Surma: To the member, thank you for the question, and I cannot agree more. Of course, safety will always be our priority, particularly during this very difficult time. But our government needs to play a dual role in making sure that we stimulate our economy in the months to come.

This legislation will make sure that we extend the tools that were previously assigned to building our subway projects to other transportation projects, other health care and other long-term-care projects. It's incredibly important that we make sure that goods continue to move efficiently throughout the province of Ontario, that people can continue to go to hospitals for the surgeries and services they need, and that we continue to build capacity in our long-term-care sector.

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

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the minister. I understand the proposed legislation would reduce barriers in the planning, design and construction of major infrastructure like highways and public transit networks, and support growth of transit-oriented communities, which are very important in my area.

Can the minister please elaborate on how the Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act will help the people of Ontario? And will she call on the opposition parties to support this bill?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Absolutely, and again, thank you to the member opposite.

Mr. Speaker, in this Legislature, we heard countless times from the members opposite about how important it is to invest in public infrastructure. In this Legislature, we have heard countless times about how important it is for us to provide funding and to accelerate the building of the highways that are in their respective ridings. And every single day during question period, the members opposite always inquire about the status of health care as well as long-term-care capacity.

This bill will help us to achieve this. It will help us to invest in our critical infrastructure so that we can make sure that Ontario prospers in a post-pandemic world.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: My question is for the Minister of Health. We have seen through the plan for hospitals that many non-urgent surgeries and procedures were cancelled through the first wave of the pandemic. This has led to 129,000 patients added to the already long list for surgeries and procedures in our hospitals.

We've also seen that many people are diagnosed later for cancer or other diseases, who will require even more interventions from our hospitals to hopefully bring them back to health.

My question to the minister is, I am curious as to the last stats that were shared. It was at 129,000 backlogged for surgery. Could the minister update us as to how many people are now waiting?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for the question. This is a serious concern. It's an issue that we did address in our fall preparedness plan, Keeping Ontarians Safe.

It's reducing the backlog. It was at about 189,000 procedures and surgeries that we were behind. We have been dealing with that as part of our fall preparedness plan in creating the extra space in our hospitals to allow for both COVID patients to be treated as well as patients who need to have these surgeries. As much as it's terribly sad that we've lost patients to COVID, it's equally sad if we lose people because their cancer surgery has been delayed or their cardiac surgery has been delayed. We want to make sure that we can take care of all of those patients in a timely way so that they can recover.

We have dealt with that as a very serious matter. We are approximately at 95% of our orthopedic surgeries right now and about 87% of cardiac and cancer surgeries. That's compared to where we were this time last year. There is still work that we need to do, but we are taking a new approach to this, which I'm pleased to discuss in the supplementary answer.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Unfortunately, that concludes the time we have available for question period this morning.

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

The House recessed from 1133 to 1300.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Mike Harris: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and move its adoption.

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

Bill 202, An Act to continue the Soldiers' Aid Commission / Projet de loi 202, Loi prorogeant la Commission d'aide aux anciens combattants.

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

Report adopted.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (ELECTRONIC LOGGING DEVICES), 2020

LOI DE 2020 MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (DISPOSITIFS DE CONSIGNATION ÉLECTRONIQUE)

Mr. Thanigasalam moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 223, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act / Projet de loi 223, Loi modifiant le Code de la route.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Scarborough—Rouge Park to briefly explain his bill.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: The bill, if passed, would require commercial motor vehicle drivers who currently log their daily driving hours of service on a paper log to use an electronic logging device to record this information.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

WOMEN'S ISSUES

QUESTIONS RELATIVES AUX FEMMES

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I rise today to recognize Women's History Month and a few other notable days in October. This month is an opportunity to celebrate the fantastic women who overcame barriers, shattered glass ceilings and kicked open doors in several fields to help get women and girls where they are today. So many Ontario women perfectly illustrate this year's theme, "Because of You." It is because of women like Ann Augusta Stowe-Gullen, who in 1883, became the first woman to receive a medical degree in Ontario, that our province has so many skilled female medical practitioners. It's because of women like May Cohen, who in 1991 established the first women's health office at McMaster University, that we now have a strong focus on the special health needs of women in

Ontario. It's because of women like Zanana Akande, who in 1990 became Ontario's first Black woman MPP and cabinet minister, that the current Legislature contains a record number of women members. It's because of women like Elsie Knott, who was the first elected female chief of a First Nation in Canada, that a new focus on educational opportunities for Indigenous communities took hold in Ontario and across the country, including speaking in traditional languages.

These are just a few of the many Ontario women who have enriched our history with their dedication and excellence. Because of them, women have rights and opportunities that were denied to their counterparts from previous generations.

Speaker, I also want to highlight another trailblazer who has made an impact not only in my life but in the lives of women and girls across our province and country: the member from Don Valley West, who recently announced that she would not run for re-election. I would like to thank the member for her tireless work as a member in this chamber and her riding, and as a former Premier of this province, and as a person. While she will be remembered in Canada's history books as the first openly gay Premier, I am personally thankful that when little girls, women and members of the 2SLGBTQ community walk through the halls of Queen's Park, they will see her photo and know that they are capable of what she has done and so much more.

Speaker, the month of October contains three other dates of importance to women:

On October 11, we celebrated International Day of the Girl. We used this day to listen to and reflect on the voices and power of girls, to support their human rights and to work to remove the challenges they face due to their gender. Right here in Ontario, we have girls leading change and inspiring their peers as volunteers, activists and entrepreneurs. They strengthen our communities and show that age is not a barrier to having a voice and making a difference.

We also celebrated International Day of Rural Women on October 15. Rural Ontario not only feeds our province but also provides employment opportunities, agri-tourism and economic growth, and women are the backbone. I want to recognize these women who are often behind the scenes and whose contributions to our province's agriculture production, food security and climate resilience do not go unnoticed.

Finally, on October 18, we marked Persons Day, remembering the 1921 court decision which ruled that women were legally persons and therefore eligible to be appointed to the Senate of Canada. Even though this was a step in the right direction, the ruling excluded racialized and Indigenous women. In fact, it wasn't until 1960 that most Indigenous women were even granted the right to vote in Canada. This is why I say that to know women's history is to know that the struggle never ends. One look in the rear-view mirror tells us that we are not that far removed from a time when women had few rights and little economic opportunity. The value in remembering

trail-blazing moments in women's history is that we realize we cannot stand still and that we must be continually moving the needle on behalf of all women and girls in our society and our economy.

Speaker, in this year, when it seems history is being made every day, the contributions of women during the ongoing pandemic have been front and centre. Where would we be without some of Canada's top doctors like Dr. Theresa Tam, Dr. Yaffe, Dr. de Villa, Dr. Henry in BC, Dr. Hinshaw in Alberta and many more who are behind the scenes in the labs doing research and combatting this virus? Where would we be without the daily sacrifice of the 81% of women who comprise the health care and social assistance workforce? Where would we be without the selfless contribution of women caregivers, who have made personal sacrifices each day to care, school and support those who cannot care for themselves? These are women in every community across Ontario and across Canada who have made it possible for our province and country to meet the tremendous challenges posed by COVID-19. We owe these women a debt of gratitude, but we cannot stop there.

We must acknowledge that the pandemic has particularly impacted women. That is why our government is determined that women will not be left behind as Ontario reopens. We want to build a province where every woman and girl is empowered to succeed, with their choices supported and sustained by a society that provides equal access to economic and social opportunities. This means increasing the number of women on boards and in senior management positions. This means supporting training programs that focus on employment, pre-employment, pre-apprenticeship and entrepreneurship specifically for women. This means increasing women's representation in traditionally male-dominated fields such as science, technology, engineering, math and skilled trades. This means reopening schools safely and supporting the child care sector in coping with the challenges of the pandemic. And this means taking action to address gender-based violence in a focused and sustained way, with a \$307-million five-year strategy to end sex trafficking of women and girls.

Speaker, the silence and secrecy that used to shroud the issue of violence against women is also a fact of history and one that can never be repeated. This is an issue for all Ontarians that is now out in the open, and I am proud of how our government is working with many groups to make our province safer for women and girls. But there is still a lot of work to do.

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Today, in Canada, one in three women will experience sexual violence in their lifetime. Women are three times more likely to be stalked and four times more likely to be a victim of intimate partner violence. Indigenous women in Canada between the ages of 15 and 24 are more than three times likelier to experience violence than non-Indigenous women.

Our government has zero tolerance for violence against women and girls. Living in freedom and safety is essential

to women's well-being and ability to reach their full potential.

Speaker, many of the barriers women have faced, both during the pandemic and beyond, can seem almost insurmountable at times. And so I return to the value of learning from, and acting on, women's history. To look at that history is to see that change is possible—change that improves women's lives and improves our entire society—but it also teaches us how much effort real change takes, and how precious and precarious it can be.

In 1971, the great Ontario novelist Alice Munro wrote, “There is a change coming I think in the lives of girls and women. Yes. But it is up to us to make it come.”

With one eye on the past and one on the future, I believe that Ontario women will keep moving forward, confidently and assertively, to provide for themselves and their families and reach their full potential. And our government will be with them every step of the way.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

Ms. Jill Andrew: Speaker, this year's United Nations theme for International Day of the Girl is “My Voice, Our Equal Future.” It echoes what we as the NDP official opposition know: Entire communities benefit when women and girls thrive.

I put forth a motion to establish an intersectional gender equity strategy where proposed legislation in this House would be reviewed through an intersectional gender lens before implementation to weigh its potential impact on women's lives, the goal being that no legislation detrimental to the lives of women and girls would ever become law in these chambers. To this day, the associate minister of women's issues—this government—has ignored my motion. COVID-19 and the Conservative government's irresponsible legislation they've rammed through has painfully illustrated its negative impact on the lives of women and girls. Today, I implore the associate minister of women's issues to work with her colleagues and be the voice of reason, even if it makes her unpopular amongst the Conservative bloc.

Speaker, COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted women, especially because a disproportionate number of PSWs and front-line health workers have been women. The minister knows this, yet she stood with a government that didn't supply enough PPE to essential workers on the front lines; a government that has said no to paid sick days for all workers, which would help stop the spread of COVID-19; a government that's legislated cuts to legal aid, shelters, supportive housing, so it's near impossible for women and children to leave violence and never look back.

This associate minister for women's issues knows that 80% of sole-parent households are led by women, yet she stands with the PC government that refuses to legislate pay equity, that refuses to legislate a living wage in Ontario, that refuses to provide families with safe, affordable, public child care. Instead, children are at risk in overcrowded rooms with higher child-to-staff ratios and slashed ECE jobs during a pandemic.

Speaker, no child care means no women's economic liberation. Girls cannot thrive if their mothers are locked into minimum wage, unstable jobs, with no workers' rights protections, especially during a pandemic. We must have a feminist, anti-oppressive, intersectional COVID-19 recovery.

Stand up, Minister, for disabled women and girls. Talk to your MCCSS colleague. Demand an immediate stop to this government's heartless clawbacks on ODSP and OW recipients. Reinstate their emergency funding and then some. Many are living without PPE because they cannot afford it—it's PPE or it's special diets or it's food, especially those who are immunocompromised. These are the mothers, the aunts, the grandmothers of the girls you claim to want to create equal futures for.

Most teachers and education workers are women. The government refuses to legislate 15-capped classrooms. This will save lives. How can the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues stand as the voice for women and girls across Ontario when her government has legislated dangerous schools?

Speaker, in order for girls to become leaders in their community tomorrow, they need to see leaders today. Several women in St. Paul's have lost their businesses or are hanging on by a thread. Where was this government with direct funding to small businesses in April? They were nowhere to be found. I wrote to the minister about these women's plights. I wrote to the minister about more funding for sexual assault centres, more funding for pay equity, and I was told, “Try MAG. Try housing. We're focusing on COVID-19 recovery”—well, these women's lives are COVID-19 recovery, and they deserve the focus. We shouldn't have government ministers being so siloed that they don't know what the other member of government is doing.

Most recently, the associate minister has stood with this government as it's legislated more power through schedule 2 of Bill 213 to bigot Charles McVety, a friend of the Premier who is homophobic and transphobic. How can the associate minister stand with trans girls, trans women, gay women, gay girls, if they're supporting this man? He is a monster.

Indigenous families need clean drinking water. They need to live free of settler violence. Black mothers need answers when their kids are gunned down by police officers who are not trained in mental health. Work with your colleagues, Minister—the Attorney General and the Solicitor General. Address the disproportionate impact of police violence on Black and Indigenous lives.

There is so much more I can say, Speaker, but I will say this: The government has slashed the status of women. The Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues doesn't even have a portfolio. Women matter more than that.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: The International Day of the Girl is an annual reminder not only of the power of young women but of the work we need to continue to do to create a more equitable world.

I am the mother of three daughters, and I am proud to watch them grow, doing everything they can to own their

space and promote their values. They have been advocates on the importance to fight climate change, of course, but they also combat every day the stereotypes and the rules that discriminate against women, like the dress code in schools—Sandrine, that one is for you.

We need to recognize that, too often, even nowadays, the different treatment between boys and girls starts at home and continues into the school. Because it is so profoundly anchored in our customs, any meaningful change in abolishing these stereotypes requires strong political will and concrete actions.

Je suis mère de trois filles, et je suis fière de les voir grandir en faisant tout ce qu'elles peuvent pour prendre leur place et défendre leurs valeurs. Elles militent pour la lutte contre les changements climatiques, bien sûr, mais elles combattent aussi chaque jour les stéréotypes et les règles qui discriminent les femmes, comme le code vestimentaire à l'école—merci, Sandrine, de nous le rappeler.

Nous devons reconnaître que, trop souvent, même de nos jours, la différence de traitement entre garçons et filles commence à la maison et se poursuit dans nos écoles. Parce que c'est profondément ancré dans nos coutumes, tout changement significatif pour abolir ces stéréotypes requiert une forte volonté politique et des actions concrètes.

We can say that progress has been made over the years, but we need to appreciate the situation using today's indicators in the eyes of our daughters to understand the work that still needs to be done. In these times, forcing us to live more virtually, I would like to stress the importance of being extra vigilant with our daughters, to protect them from sexual predators who can find their way onto their devices through social media.

Girls everywhere are demanding change: change in our society, change around the world and change that will far outlast us all.

Let this International Day of the Girl serve as a reminder to listen and take concrete action.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's my pleasure to rise and say a few words on behalf of the Green Party for International Day of the Girl.

First, I think it's essential to recognize that this pandemic has disproportionately affected women and girls. The increase in domestic violence is especially concerning, and the need to invest in supports for women and girls experiencing violence is critical.

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The COVID-19 she-cession is threatening to set gender equality back decades. The front-line heroes of this pandemic are disproportionately women—nurses and PSWs who are saving lives and caring for our loved ones; the women in our schools and child care centres working so hard to try to make life as normal as it possibly can be in this extraordinary time.

A lot of the decisions that we will be making over the next few months will determine how we bounce back from this public health and economic crisis. We must adopt policies that advance gender equality. We must do this so

that young girls today can have the opportunity to choose a brighter future for tomorrow. This means pay equity. This means raising the minimum wage and bringing back paid sick leave. It means funding for education, mental health and child care. It means supporting and investing in women-owned businesses.

Speaker, I want to close by saying how inspired I am by all the young women and girls who are leading the change on the biggest issues that we face today as a society. From the youth-led global movement to address the climate crisis to the movements to address anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, young women and girls are leading the change on the social and environmental issues that will affect their future and our futures.

So on this day that we speak out and recognize the International Day of the Girl, I just want to say that the Green Party stands with all women and girls who are speaking truth to power and showing the way to a greener and more caring future.

PETITIONS

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Catherine Fife: My petition is entitled "Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature and pass it off to the table.

MAGNA CARTA DAY

Ms. Donna Skelly: This petition is regarding Magna Carta Day in Ontario.

"Whereas the Magna Carta is a revolutionary document that influenced the English system of common law and was a precursor in the development of England's—and later, Canada's—constitutional monarchy; and

"Whereas the Magna Carta was instrumental in placing limits on the monarch's power to overrule the law and protected the rights of ordinary people; and

“Whereas the document introduced key principles that hold true in democratic societies today, including equal justice for everyone, freedom from unlawful detention, the right to a trial by jury, and rights for women; and

“Whereas it is important for the Magna Carta to be honoured and remembered as a document that changed the course of history. The fundamental traditions of equality and freedom that characterize our democratic society—particularly that nobody, not even the crown, is above the law—originated in this important document;

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

“Acknowledge the importance of this revolutionary document by proclaiming June 15 each year as Magna Carta Day in the province of Ontario.”

I will sign my signature and present it to one of the ushers.

ABUSE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION

Mr. Michael Mantha: I have a petition from Charmaine Loverin.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government of Ontario does not provide direct use of education and real life skills language, nor prevention tools about abuse in elementary (specific to first reader ages Grade 1+), middle schools and high schools; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario does not provide direct use of education and real life skills language, nor prevention tools for five top abuse situations facing many Canadian and diverse families today: physical, neglect, emotional, verbal and sexual, grooming; and

“Whereas abuse affects ages younger than 5 and 93% of abuse happens in the hands of those that young people or youth are supposed to trust; and

“Whereas statistically two in five girls and one in six boys are currently abused in Canada today, not including unreported; and

“Whereas abuse has no culture, status nor religious divide and is a long-term injury that causes stigma, shame, guilt, anxiety, even isolation that can result in bullying, self-harming behaviours, depression, youth addiction and even suicide; and

“Whereas early education, including evidence-based and new community prevention programs, will greatly benefit intervention, awareness and empowerment for prevention of bullying, addiction and suicide for victims and early offenders;

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

“Request an act to designate an ‘annual awareness of abuse prevention week’ in all Ontario primary, middle and high schools, and to provide for abuse curricula for healthy families and safe community policies, administration and accountability” by the year 2020.

I affix my signature and present it to the Clerk.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas ranked ballots allowed tens of thousands of Londoners to rank their preferences for mayor and council elections in 2018;

“Whereas ranked ballots election in London encouraged new people to run for council, and elected the city of London’s first Black woman councillor in their history;

“Whereas schedule 2 of Bill 218 would prevent municipalities from using a ranked ballot system in 2022, creating added costs for the city of London to revert back to first-past-the-post elections;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to remove schedule 2 from Bill 218, An Act to enact the Supporting Ontario’s Recovery Act, 2020 respecting certain proceedings relating to the coronavirus (COVID-19), to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to revoke a regulation.”

Speaker, I agree with this petition. I’m going to sign it and give it to an usher.

VETERANS

Mr. Michael Parsa: My petition is entitled “Supporting Ontario’s Veterans.

“Whereas our veterans have made tremendous sacrifices to make our province and country a better place; and

“Whereas veterans and their families can face many challenges including post-traumatic stress disorder, physical injury, unemployment and homelessness, all while trying to navigate a complex support system; and

“Whereas the Soldiers’ Aid Commission was created in 1915 to support Ontario’s veterans returning home from the First World War. It was later expanded to support those who had served in the Second World War and the Korean War; and

“Whereas it is a sad reality that with each passing year, the number of living veterans who served in those wars decreases ... and while we will never forget their bravery and sacrifice it is time we honour a new generation of servicemen and women; and

“Whereas currently about 230,000 veterans live in Ontario. About 93% of those veterans served after the Korean War, meaning those in financial need have not been able to access funding from the current Soldiers’ Aid Commission.

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

“Continue working hard across government to ensure assistance for our veteran heroes by modernizing and investing in the Soldiers’ Aid Commission by immediately passing the Soldiers’ Aid Commission Act, 2020 so that additional assistance to help provide:

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“—health-related items and specialized equipment, such as hearing aids, wheelchairs and prosthetics;

“—home-related items such as mobility-related renovations and repair costs;

“—personal items and employment readiness supports, such as clothing and counselling.”

Speaker, I support this petition, will add my signature and hand it to one of the ushers.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Percy Hatfield: My petition is entitled “Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Speaker, I fully agree. I’m going to sign it and pass it along to the table.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

Mr. John Fraser: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Re COVID-19 Command Table to Appear Before the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight.

“Whereas the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight was struck with a mandate to provide Ontarians with the government’s rationale for extending the COVID-19 emergency orders;

“Whereas the orders have been extended three times since the committee was struck, most recently until November 21;

“Whereas Ontarians expect transparency from their government;

“Whereas Ontarians deserve to hear what advice the Premier and his government are being given, when that advice was given and the evidence that underpins the recommendations;

“Whereas Ontarians should hear directly from members of COVID-19 command table and be given the opportunity to ask questions about their advice and recommendations;

“Whereas the Premier shall designate, as is within his power, members of the COVID-19 command table to appear before the Select Committee on Emergency

Management Oversight in the form of a public hearing to provide a brief presentation on the advice provided to the Premier and his government, followed by questions from members of the committee;

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

“To demand the Premier designate members of the COVID-19 command table to appear before the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight in the form of a public hearing at the next scheduled meeting.”

I agree with this petition and am affixing my signature to it.

FAMILY LAW

Mr. Dave Smith: I have a petition entitled “Bill 207, Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act, 2020.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas family law disputes in Ontario are often time-consuming and onerous matters for families involved; and

“Whereas the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act includes common-sense changes to simplify Ontario’s family law system, allowing parents and guardians to spend less time on paperwork and court appearances and more of their time making plans to support and care for their children; and

“Whereas, if passed, the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act would simplify and modernize the system, making it easier for families and loved ones to resolve disputes; and

“Whereas, if passed, Bill 207 would:

“—make the family law appeals process clearer and easier to navigate;

“—harmonize Ontario’s family laws with federal legislation, to make it easier for Ontarians to navigate the system and understand their rights;

“—allow parents and caregivers to request certified copies of child support notices made by the online Child Support Service, so child support amounts can be more easily managed or enforced outside the province; and

“—remove the requirement for family arbitrators to file arbitration award reports with the ministry, saving both time and money;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario pass the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act.”

I agree with this petition. I will sign my name to it and give it to an usher.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Jacques Rancourt from Hanmer in my riding for these petitions called “Time to Care.

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

“Whereas the provincial government does not provide adequate funding to ensure care and staffing levels in LTC homes to keep pace with residents’ increasing acuity and

the growing number of residents with complex behaviours; and

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

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To amend the LTC Homes Act (2007) for a legislated minimum care standard of four hours per resident per day, adjusted for acuity level and case mix.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my name to it and bring it to the Clerk.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: I have a petition entitled “Stop the Cuts to Indigenous Reconciliation.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario is situated on the traditional territory of Indigenous peoples, many of whom have been on this land since time immemorial;

“Whereas in 2015 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released its final report: ‘Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future’ which made 94 recommendations or ‘Calls to Action’ for the government of Canada;

“Whereas reconciliation must be at the centre of all government decision-making;

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

“—continue reconciliation work in Ontario by implementing the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission;

“—reinstate the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation;

“—work with First Nations leaders to sign cooperative, government-to-government accords;

“—support TRC education and community development”—for example, summer writing sessions, which they cancelled;

“—support Indigenous communities across the province”—for example, by cleaning up Grassy Narrows and drinking water for Indigenous communities.

I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature to it and send it to an usher to give to the Clerk.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORTING ONTARIO’S RECOVERY AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 VISANT À SOUTENIR LA RELANCE EN ONTARIO ET SUR LES ÉLECTIONS MUNICIPALES

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 22, 2020, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 218, An Act to enact the Supporting Ontario’s Recovery Act, 2020 respecting certain proceedings relating to the coronavirus (COVID-19), to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to revoke a regulation / Projet de loi 218, Loi édictant la Loi de 2020 visant à soutenir la relance en Ontario concernant certaines instances liées au coronavirus (COVID-19), modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur les municipalités et abrogeant un règlement.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I’m always proud to rise in the House and represent the constituents of my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood, especially as we debate bills such as Bill 218 that impact the members of my constituency—and how COVID-19 has impacted them.

As you know, Speaker, very early in the pandemic, I was raising concerns about long-term-care homes. There were so many outbreaks in Scarborough that took the lives of many loved ones in our long-term-care homes and even, tragically, one of our dear personal support workers. Any bill that has an effect or an impact on long-term care is something that I want to address, so that I can speak to the concerns of the people in my constituency.

However, in this very important bill that deliberates about the respective liabilities in COVID-19, there is also an item that really doesn’t seem to fit as well, and that is the issue of ranked ballots. I’m not sure why it has ended up in this legislation. No one has asked for it. There haven’t been any consultations or engagement in any way. In fact, there are many individuals who fought for many, many, many years to bring ranked ballots at the local level, the municipal level, who are very concerned. They’re gathering, actually, Speaker, to talk about what this means.

1340

I wish that the government would not rush this legislation but would make sure that these individuals have a chance to have their say directly on this bill and let the government hear how it will impact them, how it will impact municipalities, how it will impact communities. Given that this is about local democracy, we should not be rushing this bill through the Legislature. In fact, for both parts of the bill, it should not be rushed, because people need to have their say.

I want to deal with the substantive part of the bill, which is the measure around the liability, because this really does affect people’s lives. As mentioned by many of my caucus colleagues, it is important to non-profits, to sports organizations, to community organizations, to small businesses, to restaurants. They want to be able to understand what the liability is so that they can get insurance coverage, and I understand that. But it’s not clear that this blanket standard of gross negligence is the appropriate balance to keep our province moving in the right direction when it comes to insurability and for protecting Ontarians.

Many groups are advocating on behalf of the elderly and those in the health care system. They’ve raised serious concerns about this bill, and I hope the government is paying attention to it. The bill would prevent families who have lost loved ones in long-term care from seeking

justice. It is a deterrent. Many families and individuals don't have the capacity that large organizations have to fight things through the court system. It's an important concern that they've raised—it's definitely worth repeating here—so I would urge the government to listen.

I have not heard any response from the government that provides assurances to these families that they would be able to seek justice and hold bad-faith actors to account. Instead, this bill makes it more difficult for them to access justice. It brings to question, who is the government looking out for? Is it for these families or is it for the friends who run these facilities?

To my colleagues across the aisle, I'll say that of course workers in long-term care and in care settings have done their best under very challenging circumstances. But these institutions that make a profit from providing service—and that service is to ensure that our vulnerable Ontarians are safe, that they're healthy, that they're supported and that they're cared for. The families who have lost loved ones from COVID-19 in our long-term-care facilities deserve answers and they should be able to have their day in court; I believe that everything we do in this Legislature should be giving people the fair opportunity to do so. It is the role of the courts to figure out where the balance lies. It is not this government's place, really, to legislate that away. This measure would shield long-term-care operators and this government from liability, and that is something that puts those families who have experienced that loss at a disadvantage.

I do want to remember at this time the personal support worker, because that worker had been at the forefront of our pandemic from the very beginning. One of the first individuals who lost her life was Christine Mandegarian from Scarborough. She was beloved. She had many connections and many relationships across Scarborough, including at one facility in my riding, and I just want to remember her today.

This is a very serious piece of legislation. I would urge that the government ensures that there is proper input from these families and those who are affected before making this sweeping change.

Speaking of sweeping change, Madam Speaker, on the other hand, I am completely baffled at schedule 2 and why it is in this bill. Why has the government chosen this moment to cancel ranked-ballot elections? No one asked for this, especially during a pandemic. It feels like it's a distraction, in fact. This is something that is an affront to our local democracy. Ranked ballots matter. Local democracy matters.

Let me just explain to you why it matters. I'm going to use an example from my friends at Unlock Democracy. Under the first-past-the-post system, which has been in place since 1867—and the Premier talked about that. Whichever candidate or party has the most votes wins. So it sounds pretty simple at first. But does it really work?

Imagine 100 people trying to decide what to eat for a mid-afternoon group snack: 26% of the people want vanilla ice cream, 20% of the people want chocolate ice cream, 24% want caramel ice cream, and 30% want beets.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Beets.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: There we go; we've got a beet person right here. I am in with the caramel ice cream, Speaker. Under first past the post, the winner is beets, even though the vast majority, 70%, want ice cream. This doesn't seem fair.

Now let's look at a ranked-ballot election. Instead of "whoever has the most votes wins," which is also called a plurality, candidates have to pass a threshold to win. For a single-winner election like a mayor or council member, the threshold is 50%. Using a ranked ballot is as simple as it sounds. Voters are asked to rank their choices in order of preference, rather than just marking an X beside a single choice. On election day, everyone's choice is added up. If the candidate has passed the threshold, they're declared the winner. Otherwise, the candidate with the least votes is eliminated from the race, and all their votes are transferred to the second choice listed on each ballot.

With a ranked ballot, if your first choice can't win, your ballot still counts. This process of elimination continues in an instant runoff, in fact, until a candidate passes the threshold. With first past the post, all 100 people are eating beets, leaving most of them unhappy. With the single-winner ranked ballots, one of the ice cream flavours will win—a compromise that respects the majority.

The Premier has recently commented that allowing municipalities to use ranked ballots would confuse voters. I don't think that's a fair statement to our voters. Come on. I have great confidence in the ability of Ontarians to understand the concept of ordering their preferences. We just learned about how the system works in under five minutes, for those of you who like ice cream—other than the one beet-person vote we have here.

That is actually one of the benefits of ranked ballots—it brings voters into the election. It creates a conversation. For municipal elections, where there are often multiple candidates, you have to learn about what each other stands for in a ranked ballot so that you can order your preferences. In other words, it's local democracy. It engages the populace.

Because the ranked ballot process hinges on preferences, it results in less negative campaigning in elections. In fact, there are women who have said that this is the reason why they prefer this voting system—because it makes the process less negative.

Think about racialized candidates as well. They're also invited into this electoral process of ranked ballots and stay with the process to the very end.

There certainly is public education—this is part of it. When I introduced the bill for a ranked ballot in 2014, public education was part of it. But the Premier should give Ontarians some credit. They can learn about this new system.

We can do better than what we had in 1867. There are a lot of things that are no longer in place. Do you remember, in 1867, women could not vote? That's changed. Inuit people gained the right to vote only in 1950, and First Nations men and women were not allowed to vote until 1960. So there are aspects to our system that need

changing, and it needs changing for the better. We can improve our democracy.

I want to also address the cost, because that's part of the criticism that the government side has said. But from London's experience, these are just one-time costs. In fact, running a ranked ballot is very similar to managing an ongoing election, and so reverting back from the ranked ballot to first past the post is going to actually cost that municipality more in the end. So it's downright unconscionable that this government has decided, without consultation, without talking to anybody, to take away something that improves our local democracy and makes things better for everyone.

1350

Speaker, I urge the government to reconsider schedule—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Questions?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My thanks to the member from Scarborough–Guildwood for her presentation, her arguments, including the very tempting ice cream analogy.

You were speaking about the impact on families of what happened in long-term-care homes and their concerns about their ability to get justice for their lost relatives. Could you tell us about your experiences as an MPP, given that I'm sure many of those families were in your riding—your experiences talking to them directly and the communications you got from them?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you so much, the member from Toronto–Danforth, for that question.

Indeed, it was the very families in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood who got my attention about the effects of the pandemic in long-term care. I recall some of the stories. There was a woman who came to my office with her sister. I spoke to them over Zoom, because we had to socially distance. Their mother went into the facility just earlier this year. She was a spry person when she went in, and she quickly deteriorated. They couldn't see her, and they actually lost her. So what's motivating them is, did this home do all it could to protect their mother from the effects of the pandemic? Under the changes that the government is proposing under Bill 218, it's creating a higher threshold, with gross negligence, so that it's very difficult for families to prove and to even want to pursue litigation.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. John Fraser: I don't know what you all have against beets, but I'm with the member from Waterloo here. I thought everybody liked beets. But that's not my question.

My question is similar to the member's last question, which is in terms of the government's changes to the ability of people to take action for negligence that occurred during this pandemic, especially in Ontario's long-term-care homes. The government is also looking to make that legislation retroactive. I'm not sure whether that's going to survive a test. I have concerns about that, and I also have concerns about the fact that we're moving to a standard of

something called gross negligence and there's no justice for these families. They don't get an independent public inquiry, and their ability to sue is going to be limited. I'd like to know if the member could comment on that.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I agree with the member, my colleague from Ottawa South. I know the advocacy that he has been doing on this file, and all of us, to say we as legislators—and the government needs to hold itself to a higher standard and not to lower that standard. That's what families would expect of us, and to make sure that justice is served.

One of the things that I've cautioned this government on is, just because you have the power doesn't mean you have to use the power. When it comes to the impact of the pandemic on people in long-term care, we should actually want to know where the issues are. We should want to know how to make it better. We should want to hear from families, and we should be doing everything in our ability to protect them.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Dave Smith: The member from University–Rosedale wrote a letter to the Attorney General's office, asking for good Samaritan COVID-19-related liability protection for non-profits and their organizations as long as they followed public health guidelines. Will the member from Scarborough please say whether or not she's going to support those 58,000 non-profit organizations and support this bill?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I was a little thrown off because I am the member from Scarborough–Guildwood, and those are the constituents I represent.

As you've heard me say many, many times in this House, I want to make sure that people—and I said it in my remarks today: that for those in non-profits, restaurants, sports organizations, we have to make sure that as a government, there is a response put forward that allows those organizations to continue to be able to acquire and to be covered under insurance, because they cannot operate legally in the province without that ability. I've been pushing the government for that. I've been asking questions of the finance minister, in committee and even in my own discussion today. That being said, I want to see that happen, but I don't want to see those families impacted in long-term care losing their ability to get justice.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I thank the member from Scarborough–Guildwood for her words. She went through quite a good description of the sad state of affairs in some of our long-term-care homes, which were certainly put into the limelight through the pandemic, when every day we would have a higher tally of people who had passed due to COVID-19.

We will be bringing forward our Time to Care Act. It would legislate four hours of hands-on care in our long-term-care homes. Does she think that such a bill, such a requirement, would have helped save some of those lives, would have helped improve the quality of care in our long-term-care homes?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thanks so much for your comments.

I certainly agree that we do need to have an increase in terms of our investments in long-term care and the hours of care that are available to those who are within the system. I certainly support that. I know that the commission has put out an early report to the government—which is timely, because as we just heard announced today by the finance minister and the Premier, it will be next Thursday, November 5 that the government will be tabling a budget.

I urge the government to not make an austerity budget, but to actually have a budget that makes those necessary investments, like the hours of care. I would support an average of four hours of care for residents in long-term care, and I'd like to see that in the upcoming budget next week.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. John Fraser: I would like to go back to one of the responses that the member from Scarborough–Guildwood just gave with regard to not-for-profits, restaurants and businesses that are affected by this pandemic and the current schedule 2 in the legislation. The government seems to be implementing a very blunt instrument that is going to do harm in one place and good in another. Somehow, the government is saying, “It’s okay, because it’s going to do some good over here.” I think the government needs to take the time to get it right so we can help all of those people get, in the case of families in long-term care—like in Ottawa right now, at West End Villa, 20 families have lost a loved one. I think we can balance justice for those families against the insurance needs of everybody else. Can you comment on that?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thanks again to the member from Ottawa South. I think you’ve described it perfectly. We do need to have a system where insurability—and other jurisdictions internationally have been able to do this, without taking away people’s rights to put forward a claim that they believe they have and that they want to seek justice for. We should not be taking that away from families or making the threshold so unattainable that they won’t be able to actually achieve that justice.

I also think the retroactive nature of this is quite an overreach of power. How do you legislate back and determine what the situation is and what people were thinking? I do think that that’s also an overreach and may not pass the test.

I absolutely agree with you that the government should be looking at this in a way that helps those families but also protects the ability of organizations to obtain insurance.

1400

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): We don’t really have enough time on the clock for another question. Further debate?

Mr. Dave Smith: I listened on Thursday to a number of the speeches, and obviously I just heard the one from the member for Scarborough–Guildwood.

I want to go back to something that was said on Thursday. It was said by the member from Brampton East. In his speech, he said that this bill does not create more fairness, because what it does at its root is empower those

who are already in positions of privilege. That struck me as very odd, so I asked him a question in the question-and-answer section. I asked him about some special-needs sports groups that I’m involved with—specifically, the Electric City Maroon and White, the Kawartha Komets and Challenger Baseball—because we know that this will help volunteers of those organizations. I asked what they had for privilege that he was talking about. His response was, “Those are the individuals ... that are privileged that are going to use this piece of legislation to ensure that they are protected from the legal recourse against them because of their actions, because of their negligence.” I never got the answer. What privilege do those special-needs athletes have that he was preferring to? What billion-dollar industry was he referring to when he said that?

This legislation will help volunteers. It will help volunteers for the Electric City Maroon and White, for the Kawartha Komets, for Challenger Baseball, for the Down Syndrome Association of Peterborough Biz Group. This legislation will help people in Ontario, and I’m going to name some: Chris Williams, David Fisher, Carol Fisher, Bernie Daynes, Lisa Hopkins Mills, Mackenzie Clark, Lindsay Munoz, Evan Williams, Kevin Smith, Joanne Haacke, Simon Treviranus, Jim Legon, Graham Elliott. These are the names of people that this legislation will help because they are following the guidelines from public health and they are making their best effort and honest effort to make sure that the people that they’re entrusted to help, the people that they’re entrusted to give programming to, get that.

As I said, they’re following public health guidelines. They’re doing the things that they’re told to do, so that these programs can continue to run, because they help people like Casey, Derek, Luke, Josh, Jessica, Rodney, Tony, Andrea, Brandon, Nate, Matthew, Michael, Chantell, Roy and Dwayne. These are people who will be able to do some of the activities that they want to do because they’re being supported by volunteers. Those volunteers will be able to put those programs on because this legislation helps protect them, as long as they are following the guidelines from public health, as long as they’re doing what they’re supposed to do, as long as they’re making an honest effort and they’re doing the things they should be doing. That’s what this legislation does for us.

Why is this legislation necessary? COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on our communities, our businesses and our public sector organizations, and this legislation is necessary so that they can continue doing those things, provided they’re making an honest effort to follow public health guidelines. I have to say that again: They are following public health guidelines.

There have been some questions about why this is retroactive to March 17. Our public health guidelines have been changing as we have learned more about COVID-19. If these organizations were following the guidelines as the guidelines were coming out and they were making adjustments as the guidelines were being adjusted, they were making an honest effort to do everything that they

could do to protect people. So, yes, it should be retroactive back to March 17, back to the emergency declaration, back to when we were saying to people, "Please follow the guidelines of public health. Do the things that we're asking you to do to protect people." If you continued to do that, you weren't acting negligently; you were following the best advice of our public health officials.

We should be following the best advice of our public health officials as we go through this. The NDP, in their speeches on Thursday, said they were shocked that we were immunizing the government. There are a couple of points I'd like to make on that. First of all, the NDP BC government has done exactly the same thing to protect government employees. I'm not sure why the NDP don't want to protect people who work at ServiceOntario, or social workers or transit workers or people who work—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Madam Speaker, point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I recognize the member from Timmins on a point of order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The member is impugning motive on the entire caucus, and it's not even factual. He's out of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Back to the member for Peterborough—Kawartha—just a reminder to choose your words wisely.

Mr. Dave Smith: What this legislation will do is, it will protect court workers, those who work at ServiceOntario, those who work in the public sector and transit workers. Someone may disagree with it, but that is exactly what this legislation will do. To say that we're protecting ourselves—we're protecting the people who are the front-line workers serving the people of Ontario. That is what this legislation does.

It has nothing to do with some of the other things that have been said. We had a member from the NDP say that we're protecting long-term-care homes where they have cockroaches, where people "died in their own filth." That is negligence. This bill does not protect bad actors. This bill protects someone who has made an honest effort to follow public health guidelines. I don't believe anywhere that public health has come out and said cockroaches are safe to have in your home. I don't believe anywhere that public health has said you can lie in your own filth.

I believe public health has put out guidelines on what we should be doing, how we should be trying to help people, how we should be protecting people and on the proper use of PPE. If you follow those guidelines, you're making an honest effort. If you do something outside of that, that's not following the guidelines. In fact, we're serving notice to those bad actors: If you do those things, if you allow those things to happen, you will be prosecuted.

We've had a number of organizations that have spoken out about this in a positive light. The Ontario Hockey Federation, after Bill 218 was released, said, "We are pleased to see the government is taking an important step to bring forward legislation. This change will give sport confidence that the government will help protect players, coaches and volunteers who continue to provide a safe return to sport."

The Ontario Hockey Federation and all seven of the organizations underneath it are working towards having some form of a hockey season. They're listening to the public health experts, and they've made adjustments to how the game would be played. They've made adjustments to what the players will do. There is no interaction now between games. There is a time period that must lapse for cleaning, when one team leaves before another team comes in.

1410

There are guidelines about how many players can be on the ice. Most organizations are now playing four-on-four or three-on-three instead of five-on-five. Parents aren't allowed in the stands.

They're following the guidelines of public health. They appreciate that we have done this because kids need to be able to be kids. They need to go out and play. They need to see some of their friends. You can do it responsibly if you follow public health guidelines.

The proposed legislation would not provide protection against litigation circumstances where there is intentional misconduct or gross negligence. Two other jurisdictions have passed very similar legislation. There have been accusations that this is about Conservatives and supporting Conservative businesses or supporters of Conservatives. What's interesting about it is it's the NDP government in British Columbia and it is the Liberal government in Nova Scotia that have passed very similar legislation. It is non-partisan. It crosses all party lines. We're trying to do what's right for the people of this province. We're trying to make sure that some of the volunteers, those non-profit organizations, can still function. They follow public health guidelines.

It doesn't change any of the existing rights. Workers covered by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act are prohibited from suing their employers for work-related COVID-19; that's part of WSIB. But the proposed legislation doesn't affect this prohibition. It doesn't change anything with WSIB. So comments that are being made about, "You're rewriting things"—that's not the case.

Good-faith effort is an honest effort. Are people actually listening to what public health is saying, and are they doing the things? Are they making the changes? Are they following those guidelines? If they follow the guidelines, then they're acting based on science; they're acting based on the recommendation of medical experts. That is a good-faith, honest effort.

We should be listening to what our medical experts are saying; to say that we shouldn't would be wrong. If our medical experts are saying, "This can work. This is a safety measure that you can put in place. This is something that will mitigate risk," and you follow all of those things, are you not doing what you're supposed to be doing? Should you not be listening to that person? Should you not be listening to our medical officers of health when they make those recommendations? I personally think that we should, and that's what this bill focuses on.

What it doesn't do, though, is protect someone who intentionally exposes you to COVID-19. It does not do

that, and those are some of the implications that are being made.

What this bill does is, it allows some of the things that we do in Ontario to continue to happen. It allows organizations like the Legion to do some of its things, the Kinsmen association, the Rotary Club, the food shares—all of the different groups that reach out to our community and do things to improve our community. As long as they follow what public health is saying, they can continue to do that, and they should continue to do that. It protects hockey coaches, soccer, dance and theatre. If you follow what the medical officer of health recommends, if you put in place reasonable measures, if you're trying your best to make sure the people you're working with and serving and helping are safe, you're making an honest effort. That's what this bill does. It protects people who are making an honest effort.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I would recommend that the member opposite read this piece of legislation, because it's very clear in this act that the government has opened the door—or left a loophole, if you will—whereby if a long-term-care home was found negligent or did not operate in good faith, then they are freed of that liability. That is in the act. You can't ignore the act.

You can try to rewrite history, but what do you say to the homes in Peterborough—Riverview, Fairhaven, St. Joseph's—and the employees and the families who have been denied a public inquiry, an open and transparent vehicle to have justice? Instead, you brought in a piece of legislation which slams that door in their face. What do you say to those families in Peterborough?

Mr. Dave Smith: I would suggest that the member go back and read the legislation herself because obviously she missed the part about negligence, about not following the rules.

What I say to the support workers at Fairhaven, at St. Joseph's, at Riverview is thank you. Thank you for going in every day and helping our seniors. Thank you for doing what you're doing. This legislation will protect you because you're making an honest effort to do everything you can to help the people you're working with.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I had a chance to meet with my BIAs in a town hall meeting last week, talking about Bill 218, and offer these organizations, employees and volunteers some protection.

Can the member tell me what the WSIB—will that affect the members' claims?

Mr. Dave Smith: This legislation does not have any effect on WSIB. If you have rights and abilities under WSIB current legislation, you still have those rights and benefits under that legislation. This does not affect WSIB whatsoever.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question? The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was interesting to listen to the member's statement about some of the conditions in our long-term-care homes. We talked about homes where

people not only died of COVID-19, but were also having skin breakdowns and bedsores, or were malnourished and not hydrated enough. The cause of death might have been COVID-19, but many other conditions led to their demise.

As the member knows, on Wednesday afternoon we will be debating the Time to Care Act, to mandate four hours of hands-on care to every one of the 78,000 residents of long-term care. Does the member think that the mandate of four hours of hands-on care would help improve the quality of care to our long-term-care residents?

Mr. Dave Smith: It was only about four minutes ago that I finished my speech. I'm not sure what speech the member was listening to, because nowhere in my speech did I make any reference to the long-term-care facilities and the situation she was talking about. That would be gross negligence. That would be negligence, and that would not be covered under this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question to the member from Peterborough-Kawartha: The opposition has consistently used the argument that this piece of legislation, which protects front-line workers who are only trying to do their job during these incredibly unusual times, would provide extra protection to institutions or people who act inappropriately, who knowingly are subjecting others to the COVID-19 virus. Can you provide some clarity as to the provisions that remain, if someone would like to bring legal action against an institution or another Ontarian who they believe is intentionally hurting a loved one?

Mr. Dave Smith: This bill, to be very clear, does not protect bad actors. This bill provides protection if you are doing things in good faith, if you're following the guidelines from public health. It does not—I repeat, it does not—protect anyone from negligence, not at all. If you act negligently, you can and will be sued.

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The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: We're all getting contacted by the same organizations—the volunteer organizations, the sports clubs, the hockey clubs. The issue is, they can't get insurance. That's the issue. When you want to go rent the ice in order to be able to do whatever, you have to be able to provide a proof of insurance to the city or whoever owns the arena. If you want to use another public facility, you need to have a proof of insurance. They can't get the insurance because the insurance companies either won't insure them or will charge them a rate that they can't afford.

So my question to you is simply this: Why didn't you deal with the insurance problem rather than just dealing with the liability problem?

Mr. Dave Smith: I would like to address part of that right off the bat, and that would be the hockey organizations that the Ontario Hockey Federation provides the insurance for. Since those hockey organizations rent the ice and rent the facilities that way, they have insurance through it.

There are instances, I freely admit, where private individuals are having difficulty getting insurance, but

that's not what this bill is about. This bill is about the people who are there on the front lines helping people. It's making sure that if they follow the guidelines, if they make an honest effort to follow the guidelines, they will be protected. That's what this bill is about.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Amy Fee: I want to say thank you to the member from Peterborough–Kawartha for speaking on this today.

I want to bring it back to the beginning of your speech. It really hit me when you started talking about the special-needs sports and you mentioned Challenger Baseball. I remember the day very vividly when you brought the team who went to the Little League World Series last year here to Queen's Park. My friend Graham Elliott and his son, Ethan Elliott, went down for the game—and just hearing those stories from those kids and from the volunteers who came here with them and how much they appreciated being here, that event, that experience in their life, was amazing.

In my riding we have Track 3 ski school, which helps people with special needs learn how to ski. There are amazing volunteers there, as well—Janet Greener, Shawn Turner, Roger Janke—all helping these kids, and they are so thankful that we've put this in place in bringing this forward to try to protect them.

I'm just wondering if you can tell more stories about how that's going to help these kids move forward.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much for this. I love every opportunity to talk about special-needs sports. These are kids, these are sometimes young adults, as well, who are doing it simply for the love of the game. They recognize that they're not going to the show, that they're not going to be playing in the NHL, they're not going to be playing Major League Baseball. They are playing simply for the love of playing the game. What's wrong with allowing these groups to have that protection? What's wrong with saying to those volunteers—who give up part of their time, part of their life, so that all of these other players can experience those same things as the rest of us do.

This bill provides us the opportunity to have those events still happen so that all of those kids get to go out and be part of a team. When they're marginalized everywhere else, they get to be part of the team. They get to wear their uniform. They get to do the things that they love doing.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: I want to ask you a question based on my human rights training. In human rights trainings, you learn that what's most important is not your intention but the impact—the impact of your actions and, especially for us, the impact of our actions. So if I bring it back and I think about my colleague's question about insurance—if you know that the impact of this legislation will not allow people to get the insurance that they need or be able to have the insurance payout should something go wrong etc., etc., that's the impact.

So my question becomes, why is it that you want to stand for legislation that doesn't actually address the

impact that's happening on the ground, and instead prefer to focus on the intention, which won't create any kind of systemic change?

Mr. Dave Smith: The impact of not passing this legislation means that groups like Challenger Baseball, Kawartha Komets and Electric City Maroon and White can't take part and do the things that they need to do. It means that groups, like the Down Syndrome Association of Peterborough Biz Group, put themselves, those volunteers, at risk. This legislation—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: As most everyone in the House would know, I'm not a lawyer. I used to be a journalist, who stumbled into a political career at the municipal level, and then was convinced to join a political party and run for provincial office.

I'm going to begin by talking about ranked-balloting systems, even though it wouldn't have done much for the elections I've been involved in. Municipally, in my first election, I won by more than 7,000 votes over my nearest competitor. In my second term, I captured more than 52% in a redistributed ward.

Being a white man of privilege, active in my community, and through the connections I had after a 30-year career in journalism and municipal politics, I enjoyed a healthy margin of victory in all three of my provincial elections. Not to blow my horn too loudly, but I earned more than 61% of the vote in a by-election in 2013, winning by more than 10,000 votes. I had more than 62% of the vote with my 23,000 votes in 2014, winning by 17,000 in front of my closest competitor, and in the “blue tide” election two years ago, I increased my vote total to more than 25,000.

I tell you these numbers, and I say to you when I speak in the House that I do so because people in the city of Windsor and the town of Tecumseh have put their faith in me and have faith that I will speak from the heart, and not strictly for partisan purposes.

So I ask two questions: Why does this bill restrict municipalities that choose to adopt a ranked-balloting system? And why now? As we struggle to fight off a medical tsunami with a second wave on our doorstep, threatening to overwhelm our capacity to stay ahead of the curve, why, of all the issues we might be considering, is the government placing this on our doorstep, when our attention would well be better spent concentrating on COVID-19-related, life-saving issues?

I was reading the Sunday Star yesterday morning, Speaker. Page A6, an entire page, was devoted to the issue of the ranked-balloting system. The city of London had a ranked-balloting system in place for the last municipal election, the only community in Ontario to do so—in fact, the only city in Canada to try something that wasn't first past the post. The city's administration wrote a council report on how that experiment was received by the voters. The result: London's experiment proved that the ranked-balloting system could work in any other community in Ontario where the duly elected municipal politicians chose

to try it out. As we've heard, the city of Kingston was moving in that direction, as was the city of Cambridge.

In London's case, the ranked-balloting system was mostly responsible for Arielle Kayabaga becoming London's first woman of colour to be elected as a city councillor. She decided to run after attending an informational seminar on the hows and whys, the ins and outs of ranked balloting.

Speaker, political experts—not the provincial politicians such as ourselves in this House, but experts who spend their days studying elections and how they're run—agree that a ranked-balloting system leads to a more representative result of the personal choices of the electorate. For example, in the last provincial election, our friends across the aisle formed a majority government—congratulations—but they did so despite not having the support of 60% of Ontario's electorate; 60% of the voters voted for someone else.

In a ranked-balloting system, people are asked for their first choice, and second, third and so on. In first past the post, a candidate can get elected with far less than 50% of the vote. In a ranked-ballot election, a candidate needs in the neighbourhood of 50% to be truly representational of the wishes and choices of those who cast a ballot. Voters can then hold a firm belief that their vote actually counts, and that's a purer form of democracy.

Since candidates know they're being judged by people who have their second and third choice to exercise, they are less likely to run a dirty campaign, slinging mud at everyone else and saying outrageous things about the other competitors in the race, which might cost them the race in a ranked-balloting system. In London's case, there was still dirty politics at play, but only from anonymous sources; no candidate had their name attached.

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Ranked ballots offer marginalized groups and under-represented communities a much fairer opportunity to not only run but to be elected. That leaves the faces on our elected councils more representative of the community's entire population. That has been the case in American cities such as San Francisco, where ranked ballots have been used since 2002.

Speaker, a political action group called Unlock Democracy Canada just released a report on the London election after examining municipal results across Ontario. You may be surprised to hear that more than 1,500 municipal councillors in Ontario hold their positions with a mandate from far less than 50% of the voters. And get this: That includes most of the members of Toronto's city council. According to Unlock Democracy Canada, "Nothing is more sacred in a democratic process than to secure an outcome that reflects the genuine will and desires of the electorate."

Getting back to Councillor Kayabaga: She had the lead on the first vote, with 29%, and eventually won with 49% by the time they scoured second- and third-choice votes and so on from the other competitors.

I've heard government members from across the aisle try to defend the decision not to allow ranked balloting

because of the extra costs that London endured in running that election. Democracy does come with a price. In London's case, there were fixed costs: \$12,000 for a software licence, \$42,000 for printing a larger ballot. But when you deduct the usual cost of a smaller ballot, in total, the extra cost, according to this article, that London paid to run that election was \$24,500, which works out to 10 cents per taxpayer, according to Unlock Democracy Canada.

Sure, there were indirect costs and one-time costs explaining the new system and consulting the public—a good use of taxpayers' money, I would argue, keeping the public well informed. That cost, as the government has told us, was \$515,446, and it's their main stated reason for attacking the ranked-balloting system—the cost, during a pandemic. But in London's case, that works out to \$2 a taxpayer for a more democratic election, with people elected who carry a truer choice of the entire electorate, as opposed to the first-past-the-post system.

To those who are afraid of the new system and who say that it's far too confusing for the average voter to understand and doesn't always end up with a majority vote—such as the case with Councillor Kayabaga winning with 49% instead of 50%—London's administration says that the first-past-the-post system doesn't even try to secure a majority. The results in London clearly show that the number of people who exercised their right to rank their ballots clearly understood the system, made their choices, knew how to do it and want to do it again.

I won't belabour the point, Speaker, but I also read in the Sunday Star yesterday—there was an article featuring a profile on Ted McMeekin. You'll remember Ted as the former Liberal Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. He introduced the ability for municipalities to decide for themselves if they wished to try the ranked-balloting system. He's disappointed with the Conservative decision to ban the use of ranked ballots, but he's not surprised. He says that he recalls speaking to a couple of Conservative members at the time, who admitted to him confidentially that they would never want to see ranked ballots embraced provincially because they would never again elect a Conservative government.

The ranked-ballot system was good enough for the Conservatives to elect their leader the last time, the man who now serves as Ontario's Premier. So why, if it's good enough for their partisan party purposes, isn't it good enough for municipalities, who gauge public acceptance by running referendums on the choice? London's case proved it works well. Why is this Conservative government insisting that it never be used again in municipal elections in Ontario, especially at a time when we're dealing with a crisis?

Not surprisingly, I have trouble with Bill 218 in other areas. I have trouble understanding why a bill with the title of Supporting Ontario's Recovery Act takes away the legal supports of dozens of Ontario individuals and families impacted most severely by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of them had filed legal action against the owners and operators of long-term-care homes for the

treatment they got or didn't receive. To wit, this act "provides that no cause of action arises against any person as a direct or indirect result of an individual being or potentially being infected with or exposed to coronavirus (COVID-19) on or after March 17, 2020, as a direct or indirect result of an act or omission of the person if,

"(a) at the relevant time, the person acted or made a good-faith effort to act in accordance with,

"(i) public health guidance...;

"(ii) any federal, provincial or municipal law relating to coronavirus (COVID-19)...."

The bill's guidelines go on to say or imply, "You can't sue anyone that may have been in some way responsible for the death of your loved one or the near-death of your loved one, unless they're in some legal definition guilty of gross negligence"—not negligence, as has been stated this afternoon, but gross negligence. Negligence is a failure to use the level of care and caution that an ordinary person—you, Speaker, or me or the members opposite; ordinary people. We may be accused of being negligent if we didn't treat others in a given situation the way we would expect to be treated if we were in that identical situation—as opposed to gross negligence, the deliberate and reckless disregard for the safety and reasonable treatment of others, which has or is likely to cause foreseeable grave injury or harm to someone.

When the first COVID-19 tsunami was hitting Ontario, especially the residents of our nursing, retirement or long-term-care homes, the directions given by the experts—the rules of engagement, if you will—were in constant state of flux. We were told not to wear a mask, and then we were told to wear a mask but only if we're indoors—and then it was wear a mask indoors and outdoors. We were told to stay two metres apart, unless we were students in a classroom in Ontario.

We ran into a situation where personal protective equipment stockpiled from the SARS epidemic back in 2003 had long passed their best-before date. It was a mad scramble to locate and provide gowns, masks, gloves and respirators. We weren't making much PPE in Canada or the United States, because it was so much cheaper just to order from China or somewhere else far, far away.

Government spokespeople at the provincial and federal levels were striving to remain calm, reassuring everyone that demands for supplies were being met in every hospital and every nursing, retirement or long-term-care home, and that everyone had an adequate supply. However, our constituency offices were being flooded with calls from the front-line staff, saying that there was a huge shortage of supplies, that they were told to keep wearing their one-time-use-only gloves and gowns all shift, instead of changing out of them every time they dealt with another infected resident so they wouldn't risk spreading an infection. Some personal support workers told us they were forced to go to the dollar store to buy their gloves and masks, because their employer didn't have enough of them to go around. Some were quoted in the media as wearing plastic garbage bags instead of gowns.

Some official spokespeople were downplaying the crisis in their response. So many front-line workers became ill, it created a staffing shortage. Seeing the illness spread, death all around them, with the lack of protective equipment available to them, other front-line staff stayed home to protect themselves and their families.

The operators of some of these homes—most of them for-profit homes—were unable to provide the proper levels of care a reasonable person would be expected to accept as reasonable. In Quebec and Ontario, provincial leaders asked the federal government to send in the military to bail out the owners and operators whose facilities were hardest hit. The reports from those interventions sent chills down their spines—the conditions they met, the lack of training provided to those front-line workers in some cases. The military felt this lack of care, attention and/or training had possibly, if not more than likely, led to the death of residents.

Ontario was shamed. Some of us were sickened and remain sickened to this day. Ontario, a prosperous province, known for its talent and compassion, had turned its back on some of the most vulnerable citizens. It didn't happen overnight. It was like putting a lobster in a pot of water and slowly turning up the heat until the water boiled. Dozens of reports, dating back years, had warned successive governments of all stripes that our long-term-care homes were in crisis: too many people in wards; not enough sprinklers; not enough air conditioners; not enough training for front-line workers; not enough pay for front-line workers; no one designated as the seniors' advocate to lobby on their behalf for essential changes to a broken system; not enough not-for-profit homes so every available dollar was used to support the residents; not enough staff and backup staff so that every resident could be offered more hands-on care each and every day, depending on their individual needs.

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The COVID-19 pandemic pulled the curtain back and exposed a crisis that no longer could be hushed up or hidden from public view. There shouldn't be any more excuses for a complete overhaul of the long-term-care system. There needs to be an exhaustive and compassionate investigation into the way we, as a society, have allowed our seniors to be treated in Ontario.

The government has named a commission to start the process. It's not a full public inquiry, and it won't be listening to everyone who has a story to tell and is willing to appear as a witness.

However, Speaker, allow me at this time to quote from a news release I received on Friday last week. It begins with this line: "An interim report from the long-term-care commission reveals the sickening fact that the Ford government completely ignored the people in long-term care as the COVID-19 virus swept in." This next sentence from the commission is in quotes: "The commission 'heard that long-term-care homes were forgotten in the initial provincial plans to control the spread of COVID-19 until residents started dying.'"

The news release came from my leader's office, the member for Hamilton Centre, Ms. Horwath. She is quoted

as saying, “My heart aches for the families of the 1,900 people who died in long-term care, and the tens of thousands of others who have gone through hell, who now see in this report that the Ford government just didn’t put a plan together to protect their loved ones.” Speaker, I would hope that hearts are aching on both sides of the aisle.

We heard the Premier’s words when he said that his government would put an iron ring around long-term-care homes. I would suggest that most reasonable people will now see the legal restrictions and gross limitations contained in Bill 218 as putting iron handcuffs on the loved ones with relatives living, suffering and sometimes dying in Ontario’s long-term-care homes. This iron ring has become an iron yoke around the neck of Ontario citizens looking for answers and for someone to answer for their loss, thanks to Bill 218.

The commission’s interim report calls on the government to increase staffing levels and to mandate at least four hours of daily hands-on care per resident. That is something that we on this side of the House have been calling for for years. I’ve been here for seven years, and we’ve been talking about that forever.

The commission wants its report made public because the second wave of the COVID-19 epidemic is upon us and we have to do better this time than we did the first time around. That’s when 55% of all LTC homes had COVID-19 outbreaks and 75% of all COVID-19 deaths were in LTC homes. The report cites insufficient leadership capacity and a lack of strong infection prevention and control measures, including difficulty cohorting and isolating positive residents, often because of limitations on the physical environment. Just pulling a curtain across between an infected and a non-infected resident doesn’t cut it. It calls on the government to create more full-time positions, a comprehensive human resources strategy and more permanent money for nursing and support staff. The commission says, “Given the essential role of families and caregivers in supporting not just physical care needs but the psycho-social well-being of residents, we reinforce the calls from residents, families and caregivers to ensure that families and caregivers have ongoing, safe and managed access to long-term-care residents.” Those suggestions and recommendations will go a long way in recovering Ontario’s economy, as in the bill’s title. I hope we get to that point at some time.

Speaker, in politics, public perception of an issue quickly becomes the reality of an issue. I suggest to you that the public perception of this bill restricting legal action only on the grounds of gross negligence leaves the public with a perception of a cover-up, and that’s when we engage in conspiracy theories. That’s when we as individuals scratch our heads and ask, “Why would the government be doing this at this time?” Ordinary people, we as individuals, wonder why, and our imaginations run wild and say, “Who are we protecting? Why are we protecting them, as opposed to the public right to a fair and open court proceeding, a determination made by a judge, as opposed to a government bill”—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Questions?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Speaker, 2005 and 2009 and 2018 all have something in common: They are the years that British Columbia’s government held electoral referendums to change the first-past-the-post system. Not only did these governments see their referendums fail—and their governments were either Liberal or NDP. To note, in 2018, a referendum under the NDP government occurred just after Trudeau promised electoral reform, where several months later, the Prime Minister backed down on that promise.

In Ontario, a referendum was held in 2007 on the first-past-the-post system. What happened? The referendum, shockingly, did not pass. Like my colleague the member from Milton said, in London, the same results cost \$500,000 more.

My question: Does the member support wasting taxpayers’ money on something many Ontarians and Canadians have already made up their mind on?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you for the question.

People say things during an election and make all these promises, and when they get elected—as Mr. Trudeau did. After saying, “I’m going to change the first-past-the-post system,” he sat on his hands. But Speaker, the point of the matter is, when the Liberals ran the referendum in Ontario, there was not more than a couple of dollars put into explaining what the referendum was about. People concentrated on the election, but the party didn’t really want to change the system. They didn’t put any money in it to explain it, and that’s why the results are reflected in that vote.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Michael Mantha: We’re in days when people are asking for greater choices, looking at getting involved. We’re looking at municipalities that are getting somewhat more mature, and they’re looking at getting more people involved. First past the post was that opportunity where that choice of municipalities was made. If there’s one thing that this party supports, it’s the democratic right of municipalities to determine their own electoral system.

To my friend in the back: We have a Premier who says, “It’s always been that way.” Why would this Premier choose to take away that democratic right of municipalities to determine their future?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: First, let me begin by saying, I am so proud to be a member of a caucus that is made up of 50% women and 50% men.

All parties should be striving, as we do, to go through a nomination process where we go out and try to get more women, more people of colour, more people from the gay spectrum, more people who are disabled to run as candidates, because we know the general population of the constituents that we serve aren’t all old white guys like myself. More than 50% aren’t old white guys like myself. So the people who say that it’s always been that way don’t want to go out and attract other candidates they’re going to bring into their party with their different views. Let’s open it up so we all look like the people we represent.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

I was in municipal politics before getting into provincial politics and actually ran against 21 other people in the municipal by-election. As the member has pointed out often—actually, statistically, voter turnout in municipal politics is low. It's even lower in by-elections. We saw a drop of four percentage points in the last London election when they did change the process from first past the post.

Are you not concerned, genuinely concerned, that you're going to see even fewer voters at the polls because of putting forward a means of electing someone that people simply don't understand and haven't embraced? They rejected it in 2007. Why would you and how could you possibly see higher turnout at the polls under a changed system?

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Mr. Percy Hatfield: I think all of us have an obligation to try to encourage more people to vote. I'm not at all of the opinion that a ranked ballot is going to, in the future, have fewer people out and voting.

We all—at every level, municipal, provincial, federal—need to encourage more people to get actively involved in politics. That may be changing the education system to get people involved in civics and continue that from grade 6 or grade 8 all the way through to grade 12.

We have to get more young people thinking about voting. Right now, if you look at the voting statistics, most of the people who vote are seniors. That's not going to last forever. We've got to change the system, get more people voting and do everything we can to get more people of colour and more women as candidates as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): The member for Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. He always brings such an authentic and genuine voice when he is speaking about his riding and the people in the riding, and also particularly of seniors and veterans.

He mentioned in his comments how the report from the Armed Forces shook the entire province. I believe, and I know he feels the same way, that we have a moral and ethical responsibility to take action on that report, not just to ignore it—and certainly not to bring in a piece of legislation that protects those “bad actors,” which this government likes to say.

Given that the lobbyist registry has been flooded with for-profit, corporate long-term-care operators, how does he feel about this shift in the talking points, if you will, from the very people we're elected to serve and protect to the people who run this corporate model of long-term care in Ontario?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Some day down the road, history books are going to be written about this time in Ontario's history and people are going to wonder why, in the middle of a pandemic, we were debating ranked balloting and we were debating college and university degree-granting rights to somebody who is a racist, homophobic circus creature. At some point, they're going to say, “Who were

these members who voted this way, and why did they vote this way?”

Why, after reading the military reports—which I hope sent chills down your spine, as it did to mine, and sickened you as much as it sickened me. When we see how these people were grossly, negligently treated, why do you bring in a bill that says, “You've got to prove it”? As opposed to negligence, it's gross negligence, and it's just not what the people of Ontario are looking for.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Michael Parsa: It's a privilege for me to be able to ask a question of one of my favourite MPPs, Madam Speaker. I have two questions. I want to ask my colleague: What does he think, for an individual like me, for example, when I vote for somebody—I want to vote for that particular person, and I want that person to get elected. I'm just wondering. For example, if an individual is getting elected, I want that person to end up on the final ballot, as opposed to others. How would you respond to that?

Also, in his speech, he talked about the perception. When it comes to serving some of our service clubs—I've been involved in amateur sports for pretty much all my life, whether it was as a really bad athlete or, later on, as a coach. What do you say to people like that, who are doing everything they can to protect, following all the guidelines, but through no fault of their own are impacted by this? How do we not protect them?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I fully agree with you that we should be supporting our athletes and their coaches, absolutely. I didn't address it in my address, but I fully agree with you on that.

I want the person who I vote for to be elected as well. I know if you were at your party convention, you had a ranked ballot. You may have chosen the person who was elected; you may have chosen one of the other candidates. But you were given the choice. If my person, by some fluke, doesn't manage to get that magic number, who might I see out of the other candidates might be my second choice? I want that noted. I want that ability. There might be some person I do not want there at all, and I will never vote for that person, but I have that right and that ability, in a ranked-balloting system, to make that choice for myself. You did it at your party's convention if you were there. The people in London, Cambridge, Kingston and any place else in Ontario should have the same opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'm rising to speak on Bill 218. I'm not so pleased to be speaking on this bill today, by the way, Madam Speaker.

Bill 218 is a slap in the face of families seeking justice for the family members they lost due to negligent care. It's wrong for the government to use the cover of COVID-19 and the absolute need for charities, non-profits, small businesses and athletic organizations to avoid COVID-19-related liabilities to provide protection for negligent long-term-care homes.

We've lost nearly 2,000 of our loved ones in long-term care. That's 2,000 grandmothers, grandfathers, parents,

aunts, uncles and friends. Many of these people died in abysmal circumstances. We know this from the military reports. We know this from the people who have reached out to all of our offices. Shame on the government for making it harder for these people to seek justice for the unjust loss of their loved ones.

The bottom line is, negligent long-term-care homes do not deserve to get a get-out-of-jail-free card for the lives that were stolen on their watch. Instead of fixing the crisis in nursing homes and guaranteeing better care, the government is protecting those who were responsible for bad care. This is wrong and I'm opposed to it.

I'm also disgusted that tucked into this bill is an attack on local democracy. It's simply wrong for the Premier to use the heavy hand of big government to take away the right of citizens to improve local democracy with a better voting system if they so choose. No municipality is asking the Premier to take this democratic right away from them.

These changes not only disrespect local democracy and the decisions local councils and citizens make, but it's also an attack on encouraging diversity on city councils. The irony is, the Premier was elected as the leader of his own party using ranked ballots, the same system that elected Canada's first Black federal party leader, Annamie Paul, just a few weeks ago. The evidence points to more inclusive outcomes with ranked ballots and more co-operative and collaborative governments with ranked ballots. London's experience resulted in one of the most diverse city councils in Canadian history.

It's wrong for the Premier to take this democratic option off the table for citizens and governments—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Questions?

Ms. Donna Skelly: To the member from Guelph: You talk about how ranked balloting could perhaps make the election process a little bit more inclusive. But in 2007, as we've heard, Ontarians said they didn't want it; 63% of Ontarians rejected it. Yet I'm hearing from members of the opposition, "Give us our way, give us our way, give us our way. It doesn't matter what Ontarians said, give us our way, give us our way, give us our way. We'll stomp our feet until we get our way."

Why don't you want to listen to what the majority, the bulk of the people of Ontario said? They like the current system. They like first past the post. What is wrong with listening to the majority of Ontarians?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): The member for Guelph.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: With all due respect to the member opposite, I think the member opposite is confused about what we're talking about here.

In 2007, the vote was for proportional representation. That's actually not what ranked ballots is, frankly. I would prefer proportional representation, but I will listen to what people want, and if people at the local level want ranked ballots—which is not proportional representation—that's their democratic right to choose it. I would personally prefer proportional representation, but that's not what this bill is about. This bill is about ranked ballots.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question? 1500

M^{me} France Gélinas: As you know, there have been close to 2,000 deaths in our long-term-care homes. We will be debating a bill called the Time to Care Act, which would legislate a minimum standard of four hours of hands-on care.

Do you figure a minimum standard of four hours of hands-on care could have helped prevent some of these deaths and could have better prepared our long-term-care sector for the second wave?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the question.

Absolutely: The government's own staffing report over the summer said that if we had additional staff hired—the commission's interim report just came out saying that having a minimum standard of care of four hours would have prevented some of the tragedy we've seen. Now we have an opportunity—I believe we're going to be debating this this week, actually—in a private member's bill, so everyone in this House has an opportunity to act now on what the commission is recommending, which is a minimum standard of care of four hours every week. That's what we should be focused on—improving care, not giving long-term-care homes a get-out-of-jail-free card for bad care.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: To the member from Guelph: I just want to understand, with respect to ranked ballots—you mentioned that London had the most diverse city council ever because of this. I guess that was implied. So my question is twofold: Number one, the voter turnout was lower than it was in the previous election four years earlier, and number two, the election outcome wouldn't have been any different if it was first past the post—so how would that bring it about? I think you're looking at different factors here and maybe misleading the Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I'm going to ask the member for Oakville to withdraw his unparliamentary comment.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): The member for Guelph for a response.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I don't think I've ever taken the opportunity to mislead the Legislature.

I will have to say that London's first Black woman city councillor said she wouldn't have run in the election if there wouldn't have been ranked ballots there; she saw it as an opportunity. So I would say that's a sign that things like ranked ballots encourage more diverse candidates to run.

I think it's a false correlation to say that because the ranked ballot was being used in the election, that's why voter turnout went down a little bit in the London election. Many things affect voter turnout—the weather, the economic situation or whether we're in a global pandemic. There are many things that affect turnout, so I think it's a false correlation, with all due respect.

The bottom line for me, Speaker, is that nobody is saying city councils have to use ranked ballots. Nobody is imposing it on them. The current legislation is just giving them the option if they democratically choose to do that. I think we should honour their democratic right to do so.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): There's not enough time for a next question. Further debate?

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'm pleased to stand in the House today to speak to a bill that would, if passed, support Ontario workers, Ontario employers, volunteers, non-profits and the other organizations that make an honest effort to follow public health guidance and law as Ontario continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Madam Speaker, the Supporting Ontario's Recovery Act ensures that individuals, businesses and organizations acting in good faith are not hindered from making a difference in their communities over the fear of being sued about the inadvertent transmission of COVID-19 exposure. We are protecting the hard-working men and women who are providing essential services during this pandemic. This will allow these individuals and organizations to continue providing the services that Ontarians need—from the front-line health care workers to people coaching minor sports teams to those who are keeping our supply chain moving, to people volunteering at local food banks.

It would also guarantee the right of Ontarians to take legal action against those who willfully or with gross negligence endanger others by transmitting COVID-19. Individuals who willfully ignore public health guidance and act with gross negligence or intentional misconduct and expose others to COVID-19 will not be protected by this legislation. I repeat: They will not be protected by this legislation. The bad actors will be held accountable.

Madam Speaker, we are convinced that this proposed legislation will help support Ontario's recovery as we face these unprecedented times. Ontarians are experiencing exceptional challenges as we respond to the second wave of this pandemic. Our government is sending a clear signal that we will be there to support Ontarians when volunteers want to give their time, when businesses want to rehire staff and open their doors and when charities want to help those in need despite these incredible challenges. We will not allow the threat of COVID-19 to discourage entrepreneurs who want to hire staff. We will not allow this virus to prevent volunteers from offering their experience and knowledge to children at the local rink or soccer club as they help to get life back to normal.

Let me give you an example, Madam Speaker: Rene Juraschka is a constituent in my riding of Flamborough—Glanbrook. Rene has been a volunteer at the Flamborough Dundas Soccer Club for over 25 years. When COVID-19 hit, the directors of the soccer club brainstormed to figure out how they could continue to play. Governing soccer bodies worked with health officials to develop a three-phase return to the sport. But they were advised by lawyers that waiver forms signed by parents and players simply wouldn't be sufficient protection against legal action if there was COVID-19 exposure, despite the fact that they were following all of the protocols within public health

guidelines. Understandably, these volunteers were not in a position to take the liability risk. Here is what Rene told us: "Legislators needed to come up with a bill to protect volunteers in their roles in community clubs."

In Ontario, we are passionate about youth and amateur sport. This past spring and summer, my constituency office was inundated with emails and phone calls from frustrated parents who had to tell their children they couldn't play soccer this year because the organization directors were concerned that they may be held personally liable for exposure to COVID-19. They were pleading with our government to do something about this. Specifically, the parents wanted our government to change the law to protect sports organization volunteers who were doing the right thing and taking all the recommended health and safety precautions but simply were afraid of being sued.

Athletes, coaches and volunteers add so much to the fabric of our communities. This proposed legislation would allow everyone involved in youth and amateur sport to safely return to play without the fear of legal action. Our province needs an army of volunteers to help keep our soccer clubs, our hockey associations and countless other service organizations, in order to keep their vital work with our young people.

We cannot allow fear of liability to stop local charities from holding fundraisers and reaching out to the people who need their services the most. The Ontario Nonprofit Network indicated that civil liability immunity would help to address significant cost increases in the industry, and it would help alleviate challenges in recruiting and retaining volunteer boards of directors. If the province is to continue on the path to recovery, we need to support Ontarians who act in good faith and make an honest effort to follow public health guidance. This is why we are listening to the concerns of these Ontarians. This is why our government is introducing legislation to support our province's front-line workers so that they can focus on their work without fear of retribution.

Madam Speaker, I want to acknowledge the tens of thousands of people who make important contributions within my community of Hamilton and right across the province. Health care workers, restaurant staff, grocery store clerks and employees in coffee shops and pharmacies are the everyday heroes who have kept and continue to keep our communities moving and growing. They are the driving force behind our province's success, and we rely on them as the province continues on the path to recovery. We have always valued and respected the work that they do, but this COVID-19 crisis has underscored their value, and we have an even deeper appreciation for them now. These workers provide a vital service to the community.

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Hamilton restaurateur Jason Cassis said that he would welcome legislation that offers liability protection for businesses that sincerely believe they are following all the public guidance. Cassis says that many businesses in the hospitality industry are operating under such significant financial stress right now that a frivolous lawsuit could shut them down for good.

I've spoken to dozens and dozens of entrepreneurs since the start of the pandemic. I've listened to their concerns. I know how passionate they are about the work that they do. They have taken stringent measures to keep the people around them safe.

Duncan Macintosh owns Soccer World in Hamilton. He trains hundreds of children, youth and adults in his 50,000-square-foot facility. Macintosh went to exceptional lengths to ensure the safety of his staff and of his clients. He installed Plexiglas barriers and a new ventilation system. He invested in foot pulls and antimicrobial copper push plates and handles to reduce the possibility of surfaces being contaminated. He restricted visitors at drop-off and pickup points for camp parents using walkie-talkies. These measures were taken on top of masks and hand-washing and physical distancing. And still, with all of these safety measures, Duncan Macintosh was concerned about being sued if one of his clients were exposed to or infected with COVID-19.

Here is what Duncan Macintosh of Hamilton told us: "I would hope the government and courts are able to insulate businesses and organizations who go to extra lengths and take efforts to keep their customers and staff safe from opportunist COVID lawsuits."

The focus of this proposed legislation is intended to protect the individual who, in good faith, has done absolutely everything they could to keep people around them safe.

I've listened to the concerns of a number of my constituents, who are doing their best to help their communities recover. Let me give you another example of a small business owner who is doing everything he can to ensure that he is following public health guidance.

Zoran Dabic owns CrossFit Battlefield, a CrossFit fitness facility in Hamilton. They only allow registered athletes to train in their gym. The doors are locked to members of the public. They insist on four metres of physical distancing between athletes—that's double the requirement. They clean and disinfect between each class. CrossFit Battlefield has taken exceptional steps to ensure public safety.

Zoran Dabic encouraged our government to protect small businesses against baseless COVID-19 lawsuits. Here's what he had to say: "Operating a small business and making ends meet was enough of a challenge before coronavirus. Restrictions and the necessary extra preventive steps add to that challenge, but are worth the effort and cost if they can help stop the spread of the virus. The lack of liability protection, however, and the possibility of losing everything if we were to unknowingly or unintentionally have someone in our facility become ill, is gut-wrenching and an additional stress many of us simply can't handle."

I know how passionate these people are about their businesses. They are protecting their staff. They are protecting their customers. They are extremely conscientious about protecting the people around them from COVID-19 exposure. These small business owners should not be worried about frivolous lawsuits at the same time they're

trying to get back on their feet, simply trying to make a living.

This legislation ensures that if a lawsuit was filed because they were permitted to stay open and they made an honest effort to follow the rules and believed they were in compliance, they would be greater protected from civil liability for the transmission of COVID-19 unless a court determined they were grossly negligent.

Again, this legislation will not protect the bad actors. This legislation will protect hard-working people like Duncan Macintosh and Zoran Dabic—people who can clearly demonstrate that they have in good faith followed all of the public health guidance to protect against COVID-19 exposure and infection.

This legislation would also guarantee that Ontarians are able to take legal action in cases of gross negligence and intentional misconduct, and against bad actors who intentionally ignore the rules. I have to repeat this: This legislation would also guarantee Ontarians are able to take legal action in cases of gross negligence and intentional misconduct, and against bad actors who intentionally ignore the rules.

Madam Speaker, to ensure that workers are compensated for work-related injuries, the proposed legislation will not interfere with the existing workers' compensation system. In addition, workers who are not covered by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act would continue to be able to sue their employer and/or any third party for work-related COVID-19 exposure and infection. It would not stop workers from accessing their rights under WSIA or change the existing system in any way. Workers who are not covered by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act would be able to sue their employer and any other person for work-related COVID-19 losses, just as they are able to sue right now.

COVID-19 has disproportionately affected residents and staff at long-term-care homes right across Ontario. Again, I want to stress that the proposed legislation would not prevent access to justice for individuals in long-term-care homes. Individuals would be able to file claims and seek redress against long-term-care homes for matters including, but not limited to, failure to provide the necessities of life. Individuals would be able to file claims and seek redress against—gross negligence or willful misconduct, fraud and fraudulent misrepresentation, unlawful confinement, and assault or battery.

Madam Speaker, for any other type of negligence that we heard from my friends across the aisle—for example, if a resident is malnourished or not cleaned properly or not given proper medication or mistreated—the standard or legal tests associated with these claims will not change. The safety and well-being of residents and staff at Ontario's long-term-care homes is and continues to be our government's top priority. We are not giving a pass to those who fail to make a good-faith effort to comply with public health advice or who act with gross negligence. Our government, again, will hold bad actors accountable for their actions. This legislation will not protect those individuals against legal action.

This immunity will provide higher, although not absolute, liability protection for all people and organizations who are alleged to have exposed someone to COVID-19 and thereafter are sued.

Why introduce more protection through this legislation? Stakeholders from all sectors have raised concerns about the fear of being sued over exposing someone to COVID-19 and, of course, the legal costs associated with defending those lawsuits. If a person or organization is sued over possible COVID-19 exposure, they will be able to use this new immunity to either have the claim dismissed early or use the immunity to defend their position at trial.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario is not the first province to introduce legislation to protect workers and businesses who make an honest effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As you've heard many times, the NDP government in British Columbia passed legislation that protects people and businesses that can prove they followed or reasonably believed they were following all emergency and public health guidelines, and Nova Scotia issued a ministerial directive to protect the long-term sector and people there who act or reasonably believe they acted in accordance with public health guidelines.

If passed, the proposed legislation would be retroactive to March 17, 2020, when the province declared a state of emergency in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

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The COVID-19 outbreak has caused tremendous stress for workers and businesses right across Ontario. Despite being informed and acting in good faith by taking all prescribed measures, they still have concerns. They fear the financial implications of litigation related to COVID-19 exposure or infection. They are worried that litigation could impact their ability to continue to serve their communities.

That is why our government is taking action now to support those who make essential contributions to our communities and to help Ontarians access the services they need. Their work is critical to helping businesses and organizations to focus on recovery and growth. This proposed legislation would support Ontario's continued recovery and ensure that public health and workplace safety remain a top priority for individuals and businesses, without adding unnecessary burdens to Ontarians who make an honest effort to follow the rules.

Keeping Ontarians safe, especially our most vulnerable residents, continues to be our government's top priority. We remain committed to taking every step to protect long-term-care residents, staff and visitors. Personal support workers are the backbone of every retirement and long-term-care home in Ontario. We need these PSWs in our long-term-care homes, our retirement homes and our hospitals. Each day, thousands of front-line workers and volunteers put their own health and safety at risk to contribute to the recovery of our province.

The level of risk doesn't end there. These workers and volunteers also risk significant civil liability in the event of COVID-19 transmission to a third party. This risk applies even if workers make good-faith efforts to take all

the necessary precautions established by public health teams. PSWs should not fear going to work to care for our most vulnerable population, only to get sued by their clients and potentially their employer. Across the board, stakeholders representing PSWs agreed the proposed changes would decrease the likelihood of lawsuits around good-faith conduct and go a long way to protecting workers.

Mr. Speaker, if we are to recover as a province, we need to support Ontarians who act in good faith and make an honest effort to follow the public health guidance.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We now have an opportunity to ask questions and get responses. I turn to the member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The member from Flamborough–Glanbrook talked a lot about long-term-care facilities and about the rights of businesses to be protected in certain circumstances. I'm thinking of Christine Mandegarian, who was the first personal support worker to die in this province. To date, 14 health care workers and eight PSWs have died. Christine died after five weeks of lobbying and pleading for personal protective equipment. Christine and her colleagues were working short for years, and this was deemed acceptable. In this instance, it was a long-standing issue.

So I guess the question really is, who is the government trying to protect? Several long-term-care homes have registered under the lobbyist registry. But really, does Bill 218 protect the government from litigation for gross incompetence?

Ms. Donna Skelly: This legislation, as we've mentioned many times in the Legislature over the past few days, is here to protect our front-line workers. It's very clear: They are afraid. Our volunteers—whether they're in amateur sport or in other types of community activity, in food banks etc., or who are working on the front line in our long-term-care facilities, in our hospitals—are worried that they could be part of a lawsuit, even though they did everything possible to protect their clients, to protect the children they work with, to protect some of the people who are in these long-term-care facilities, even though they took every possible health measure. If a person in these facilities is exposed to COVID-19, they could be held liable. They could be included in a lawsuit. Those are the people that this legislation will protect.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: The recovery act, 2020, provides liability protection, as you know, to workers, volunteers and organizations that make an honest effort to follow public health guidelines and laws related to the exposure of COVID-19. Could the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook speak about the effect of that in her riding, please?

Ms. Donna Skelly: As I mentioned in my comments, we have heard since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic from a number of organizations that are really worried about whether they could continue and be exposed to some sort of a frivolous lawsuit simply because somebody within their organization contracted COVID-19.

I mentioned to you, in fact, that one of them is from Hamilton Centre and the other is from my riding. These are individuals who run organizations that work with young people. Some of the comments were, “Please, please do something. Bring forward some legislation, because we want to continue to work with young people. We want to provide some sort of relief during these very, very difficult times under these circumstances under the pandemic.” But they were afraid that they would be exposed to civil litigation. These are the people this legislation will protect.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I was pleased to hear the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook talk about how keeping Ontarians safe was their number one priority and that her government was willing to take every possible step to keep people safe, and about PSWs being the backbone of our long-term-care system. She went on to say that they were putting their own health and safety at risk to get to those most vulnerable in our long-term-care homes.

Do you believe that a minimum standard, as recommended by the commission, of four hours of hands-on care would help your government achieve your stated goal of keeping every Ontarian safe and taking every step possible?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Our government believes in putting in place possible measures to protect these PSWs, and that’s why we’ve introduced this legislation, the Supporting Ontario’s Recovery Act, 2020. The provisions within this legislation will protect our PSWs, our nurses, all health care front-line workers. They will also protect people within, as we mentioned, amateur organizations and volunteer organizations from being exposed to frivolous lawsuits.

Our government has implemented a number of measures to keep Ontarians safe. This is just one step in the many things that we’ve brought forward over the course of the past seven months to protect Ontarians, but this is specific legislation to protect them from frivolous lawsuits. It’s tough enough going to work under these circumstances, to try to stay safe and protect people you work with, but to be exposed to a frivolous lawsuit is simply unconscionable. This legislation will protect those people and provide some sort of a barrier from that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Mississauga–Lakeshore.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: As many of you have noticed, I’ve been working with local businesses in my community, whether it’s Solstice Restaurant for public health guidelines, or Bruno, the gentleman who owns Pilates Body right across from my office. I know first-hand the import of this bill for business. All the businesses in my riding are doing whatever it takes for them to cope with COVID-19.

Can the member explain how this bill will help the people of Mississauga–Lakeshore?

Ms. Donna Skelly: To the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore: I’m glad you raised that because, as you know, restaurants have been probably the most hard hit during

the pandemic. We heard from, and I mentioned it in my comments, one Hamilton restaurant owner who was looking for this type of a provision, this type of legislation. They were sharing their experiences, how difficult it is with the social distancing and the restricted number of people—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I apologize for interrupting partway through your response, but pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there have been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader or someone else who has the authority to do so directs the debate to continue.

1530

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): That’s a deferral slip?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Deferral.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I don’t want the deferral slip. I want an answer as to whether we’re going to continue the debate or the debate is adjourned. I recognize the member from Barrie–Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you, Speaker. Let the debate continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The debate will continue.

I cut you off in that answer.

We’ll go to another question. The next question goes to the member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: This bill requires family members who have lost loved ones and staff who have suffered because of the consequences of COVID-19 and things that have happened in long-term care that should never have happened in the first place—this bill requires people to prove gross negligence. Lawyers have said that this is not the standard that has been in Ontario—that the standard has been negligence, and that it’s impossible to prove gross negligence.

I’m wondering if the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook could please explain to the House the difference between negligence and gross negligence, and why this government chose the higher barrier to prove in court.

Ms. Donna Skelly: As the member opposite pointed out, this legislation does guarantee that Ontarians are able to take legal action in cases of gross negligence, intentional misconduct and against bad actors who intentionally ignored the rules.

Mr. Speaker, while we are protecting people who are doing everything they can to follow the rules, protecting their staff and their clients, this legislation will not prevent someone who wants to bring a challenge because of what they believe was gross negligence—in the event of COVID-19 only. We’re not talking about any other negligence with malnourishment or neglect or abuse. But if there has been presumed—and arguably if someone is concerned and they believe a loved one has contracted

COVID-19 through gross negligence, civil action can be taken.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Mr. Speaker, I know that, just like me, many members of caucus and even the opposition have heard from their local non-profits, sports leagues, small businesses and more about how they wanted to see our government take action to protect good-faith actors.

Can the member please talk a little bit about what this legislation does to protect people like Peter Dippell and Melanie Mathers from the West Ottawa Ringette Association, Jamie Janes from the Metcalfe and District Hockey Association and Cassandra Greer from the Ottawa Fiddle and Step Dance Association as we slowly reopen the province?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you to the member for the question.

This legislation will protect people in Ottawa; it will protect people in Kitchener, in Pembroke, in Hamilton.

Let me share a couple of comments from people from Hamilton. Duncan Macintosh, who owns Soccer World in central Hamilton, reached out to us asking for this type of legislation because he said, "I'm putting in every possible ... I'm taking even more measures to make sure that my clients, the kids that are coming out to Soccer World are safe, that my staff are safe. But I'm worried. Even though I'm trying and we're struggling, trying to stay open through this pandemic, I'm worried that somebody is going to sue me. Please protect us. Please, please bring forward some legislation so that Soccer World can remain open."

That's just one example, Madam Speaker. People across Hamilton reached out to my office asking for this type of legislation. That's why we brought it forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): The member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm pleased to rise today to participate in the debate on Bill 218. Speaker, of all the bills that this government has introduced in the guise of COVID-19 recovery, I think Bill 218 has got to be one of the most reprehensible and the most out of touch with the real priorities of the people of Ontario. While it is convenient for this government to refer to all of the legislation it's bringing in as measures that are going to help Ontario recover from COVID-19, just because you call it a COVID-19 recovery bill doesn't make it so. In fact, I would suggest that a more appropriate title for Bill 218 would be the "protecting long-term-care shareholders and undermining local democracy act," because that is exactly what this bill does.

There are two schedules in this bill, Speaker. Both of them are equally reprehensible. I will spend some time on each schedule.

The first schedule is around liability of persons, individuals, corporations or entities, including the crown, from being sued for damage that could have resulted from COVID-19 infection. This schedule of the bill would remove any accountability from, as I said, any individual,

corporation, entity or even level of government from being sued for damages.

The schedule is retroactive to March 17, 2020, the day that the state of emergency was declared, which means that anything that has happened since March 17, 2020, is now exempt from any court action that might be pursued. There are, we know, a number of lawsuits currently in process; there will be no compensation or relief for the plaintiffs who have already started legal action against some of the, let's face it, long-term-care homes that have been exposed throughout this pandemic for their failure to protect residents.

The bill also requires that gross negligence be proven, rather than the current standard of ordinary negligence. This is a much higher bar for plaintiffs to prove and it will, of course, make it much more difficult for a lawsuit to move forward.

Finally, it redefines "good-faith effort." The bill says that entities, corporations or individuals who act in good faith, who make an honest effort to pursue a particular course of action, cannot be held accountable. Speaker, if you were here during the lead debate from the member for Brampton, who spoke on behalf of our caucus, he made an analogy that I found was very helpful: That is that anybody who says, "I gave it my best shot, I acted in good faith," is now absolved from responsibility.

The problem is, when the legislation covers any individual, corporation, entity or government, you are putting soccer coaches and hockey coaches and food bank volunteers on the same level as people who should be expected to know how to act. They have a level of professionalism that one would expect they would be able to act in a way that doesn't cause harm to the people they are entrusted with.

Why would the government want to bring in this legislation? Why would they want to provide this protection from liability for all of these individuals, corporations and entities? When I read the lead speech from the Attorney General, I think that there were some interesting insights in that speech. As I said, he talked about the volunteers, the hockey coaches, the soccer coaches etc. who will be exempt from liability. And yes, we've all heard from non-profit organizations in our ridings who are concerned about rising insurance costs and who have requested good Samaritan legislation.

1540

But the Attorney General, in his remarks, talked about the input that was received from the Ontario Retirement Communities Association, which represents 95% of all licensed retirement community suites in Ontario. He shared the fact that they told him that civil immunity would help to prevent job losses, reduce risk for potential investors and help to reduce the pressure on long-term-care homes by preventing interruptions that might impact the development of new suites.

Speaker, we know that the retirement homes in Ontario are entirely operated by the private sector, but many of the big corporations that own retirement homes also own long-term-care homes. And so when the Attorney General

talked about the interest of the Ontario Retirement Communities Association and having some kind of liability, he was also talking about the interest of the long-term-care sector, because those two sectors are linked through ownership by for-profit corporations.

The Attorney General also talked about the fact that he had never met with lobbyists from the long-term-care industry. But, interestingly enough, when the lobbyist registry was reviewed, it was revealed that the Attorney General has had a number of meetings with lobbyists who represent the long-term-care sector. On June 1, he met with a lobbyist who was there on behalf of Sienna Senior Living. On May 7, he met with a lobbyist who was there on behalf of Revera. On July 14, he met with a lobbyist who was there on behalf of Southbridge Care Homes. He has also had a long-term relationship with his former chief of staff, who is a lobbyist for Revera.

Speaker, when you look at the lawsuits that are currently under way, the legal actions that have already been registered as a result of the COVID-19 virus, we will see that there is a class action against Revera. We will see that there is a class action against Revera and Sienna. There is a lawsuit that has been launched against Orchard Villa, which is owned by Southbridge Care Homes. There is another lawsuit against Southbridge Care Homes, Orchard Villa, and a third lawsuit against Southbridge Care Homes, Orchard Villa. There is a lawsuit against Altamont Care Community, which is owned by Sienna Senior Living. And then of course there are lawsuits against Sienna Senior Living as a corporation, another lawsuit against Sienna Senior Living, a lawsuit against Altamont Care Community, which is owned by Sienna Senior Living, and a lawsuit against Woodbridge Vista Care Community, also owned by Sienna Senior Living.

Speaker, one really has to ask, how many lawsuits have been registered against hockey coaches or soccer moms? Not a single lawsuit. All of the legal actions that are currently under way have been taken against for-profit corporations that have been running our long-term-care sector.

We know from the devastating report of the Canadian Armed Forces about some of the conditions in long-term-care homes in Ontario. We know about cockroach infestations; residents who are lying for hours, if not days, in their own feces; rotting food; missed meals; COVID-19 patients sharing rooms with residents who did not have COVID-19.

We also know from various reports that for-profit care homes were much more likely to have experienced COVID-19 outbreaks, and that the outbreaks in those homes were much more deadly than outbreaks in non-profit or municipal homes. So, yes, it is quite likely, Speaker, that families whose loved ones have been in the care of these for-profit long-term-care homes may want to take legal action against the operators of those homes and perhaps against the government for the conditions that their loved ones were experiencing.

Someone remarked that the Premier had said that he wanted to put an iron ring around long-term-care homes.

What he is doing with this bill is putting an iron ring around the long-term-care for-profit corporations that are running these homes.

The reaction to this bill from families has been very emotional. Cathy Parkes, who lost her mother in long-term care, says, "My family and others like us have been through a living hell in the past six months. We watched our loved ones suffer and die while our hands were tied and the only people who could help didn't move fast enough."

There are other words that have been spoken by family members of residents in long-term care who are shocked and disgusted and appalled that they no longer have this recourse to pursue justice, that their stories will no longer be able to be told through our legal system.

Speaker, the legal community, despite what the government wants to say, has been very clear that this legislation will create significant barriers to allowing families to pursue justice. Graham Webb, from Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, says, "It is difficult enough for residents and their families to prove the ordinary civil standard of negligence against business operations like a long-term care home without having to discharge the higher and ambiguous standard of 'gross negligence'. This is all about protecting the rights of negligent long-term-care home operators at the expense of residents" who were "injured through the fault of the operator."

Another interesting comment, from Toronto lawyer Rocco Achampong, was, "There has to be some concern in the bureaucracy that liability could be attracted by some of the advice being given or some of the action being taken, and in anticipation of that they may be protecting themselves."

So let's think about that, Speaker: Why would the government want to protect itself, as an entity of the crown, from liability? Well, we have heard that since as early as January, February, and throughout the summer, there were numerous warnings that were given to this government and to the Minister of Long-Term Care about the actions that the government needed to take in order to protect residents and staff in those long-term-care homes. We heard that the Treasury Board had rejected the request for funding so that long-term-care homes could hire more staff. Not just once but twice those requests for funding were rejected. We heard that senior infectious disease experts were calling in June for significant IPAC, infection prevention and control, measures to be implemented in order to prevent a devastating and deadly second wave. Those recommendations were made in June. As of right now, those recommendations have not been acted on.

Even a coalition of stakeholders in the long-term-care sector wrote a letter in June to the Minister of Long-Term Care in which they said "plainly and directly that the government of Ontario has not yet put the necessary supports and preventive measures into place that we in the sector have long made clear are essential to protecting our residents [and] staff."

Then, in September, we saw memos from ministry officials to long-term-care home operators saying that

they're on their own; they shouldn't be looking to this government for help.

So, yes, of course the government wants to pass legislation that's going to protect itself from acting on all of this advice and all of these recommendations that were made.

Speaker, in the short time that I have left, I want to turn to schedule 2 of this bill, which is the schedule that prevents municipalities from using ranked-ballot voting in municipal elections. I have to say, speaking as a representative of the city of London, the first and only municipality in Canada to have used ranked voting in 2018—certainly, the first and only in Ontario—this legislation came completely out of the blue. There was zero consultation done with my community; zero consultation done with Kingston, Cambridge and other municipalities that have already passed referendums to move to ranked-balloting systems; zero communication done with Burlington and Guelph and Barrie and Meaford and all of the other municipalities in Ontario—

Interjection: Toronto.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: —and Toronto—that are also interested in using ranked-ballot voting.

1550

Suddenly, this little provision was slipped into Bill 218, and the government's rationale is that it's too costly. They don't want municipalities spending money. Well, frankly, Speaker, London is now going to incur costs to shift from a very successful ranked-ballot voting process that we used in 2018. We're now going to have to pay to return to first past the post. On the other hand, what business does this government have in dictating how locally elected representatives anywhere in this province are going to conduct local elections? They have no business whatsoever.

We also heard the Premier saying that ranked ballots are too confusing. Well, Speaker, the Premier may not realize it, but he was elected by a ranked-ballot system, as is every leader of every political party at all levels of government. The Premier says all Ontarians should still be voting the same way we've been voting since 1867. Frankly, only men who were 21 years of age or older and owned property were able to vote in 1867. Surely the Premier is not saying that we should return to that system of first past the post.

We also heard that this way of voting is necessary so that there is some consistency across municipal, provincial and federal systems of voting. There are no party affiliations on the ballot in municipal elections, so that's one big difference between provincial and federal. I don't think the Premier is saying that we should start having a system of party affiliation at the municipal level. But second, every municipality in Ontario elects their government in a different way. Some vote for deputy mayor, some vote for regional councillor and some vote for county councillor or warden. There is no consistency across municipalities. So for this government to say, "We need absolute consistency on the ballots at all three levels of government," is just ridiculous.

The people of London have spoken loud and clear. We were talking about this in 2014, when a number of councillors were elected who were in favour of ranked ballots. They voted 10 to 4 to implement a ranked ballot. We ran a ranked-ballot campaign in 2018 that is being looked at by municipalities across Canada as the model that should be adopted because it really was a flawless election process. The deputy mayor of London, Jesse Helmer, put forth a petition last week that has already garnered more than 1,000 signatures from Londoners who want to keep a ranked ballot.

Speaker, this government has no right to be meddling in municipal affairs. The people who are elected locally should be able to determine how they are going to run municipal elections. It is an affront to democracy for this government to throw this into a COVID-19 recovery bill, of all things, and the people of London are going to continue to push back. We're also going to continue to offer to share what we have learned to the many other municipalities in Ontario that want to use ranked balloting because they recognize that it is good for democracy.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you to the member from London West for participating in debate today. I heard a lot of talk about long-term care but didn't really hear much about charities or small business owners or sports leagues, and those are all important parts of our society. Something that my kids are really looking forward to is returning to sports. So I would be interested to hear her thoughts on how this legislation would apply to them. I'm going to have an opportunity to speak a little bit later and highlight some of the letters that have come into my office. I'm just wondering about some of her thoughts on that.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciate the question from the member for Kitchener–Conestoga. The question is exactly why the leader of the official opposition has requested that for-profit long-term-care homes be exempted from this legislation—because we have all received letters from the non-profit sector, from sports organizations etc. in our communities that have asked for good Samaritan legislation. But this is not good Samaritan legislation.

Let's call it what it is: It's legislation that is designed to exempt long-term-care-home shareholders from being liable for the abuse and the harm that was experienced by residents of those homes.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member from London West.

My question, I think, is timely because the member opposite highlighted this: Every time the Conservatives speak about this bill, they talk about the coaches, they talk about small business, they talk about the volunteers, and they never talk about how this will shield and immunize the government and the for-profit long-term-care centres. I'm wondering why they shy away from it, in your opinion, and why they feel like this bill wouldn't survive if they didn't also protect long-term care and the government from the threshold that maybe a soccer coach would have for liability.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you to my colleague the member for Sudbury for the question.

I think I addressed in my remarks some of the meetings that have been held between the Attorney General and lobbyists for the long-term-care sector. It is certainly interesting that the meetings that have been held are with those exact long-term-care corporations that are currently facing legal challenges before the courts because of their failure to protect the residents who were in their care.

Speaker, one has to ask—if the government was only interested in the non-profit sector, in the hockey coaches, in the soccer moms etc., they wouldn't have built long-term-care homes into this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Vincent Ke: Bill 218 clearly excludes causes of action and proceedings with respect to gross negligence and breach of standard of care. It absolutely does not change the standard of legal tests associated with these claims.

The NDP constantly claims to fight for the rights of the very same group of people that this bill will affect, including front-line health care workers and the essential workers who work to fight the pandemic and keep our supply chains moving. The NDP also asks to increase the minimum wage of PSWs.

My question to the member opposite is: How could you choose to not protect these same people from becoming defendants in legal cases consistently that they risk—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you.

Mr. Vincent Ke: —their own life and health for the sake of—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. I'm just going to remind members to listen for the Speaker. Back to the member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I think I already addressed the main question that the member was asking about protecting the soccer coaches and the hockey coaches and small businesses. There could have been a bill that did exactly that, but instead, this government has decided to introduce legislation that covers any individual, any corporation or any entity, and covers the crown.

Speaker, we know that the government must be worried—actually, we don't know this. We suspect the government must be very worried about all of the information that has been revealed about the multiple warnings that were received and ignored about what had to happen to protect residents of long-term-care homes. And so they, of course, want to protect themselves and they also want to keep the long-term-care sector for profit, which is why they want to protect those corporations.

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The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Let's be clear here: If anybody thinks this bill is about protecting hockey coaches and people who are working in a Legion or any of the—I've got some swampland in Florida I can sell you.

This bill is about one thing and one thing only. It's about protecting your government and protecting for-profit long-term-care facilities.

I want to tell you a quick story. I don't know how long I've got. Let me see—

Interjection: Not much.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Not much.

Lundy Manor: 21 people died. This is what a lawyer is saying: “Why are you forcing these poor people to prove a higher standard?... It's going to make it very difficult for people to succeed on their claims.”

My question is clear: Why do you think this Conservative government supports this bill?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I think that based on what I have read about concerns that were raised by the long-term-care sector, which as we know is largely for-profit, they are very concerned about insurance costs rising and whether they can continue to make a profit. And so they have asked the government for some help to indemnify them from legal action because of the gross negligence that they have demonstrated in caring for their residents. This has been well documented by the Canadian Armed Forces, by the Canadian Medical Association Journal study and by a Toronto Star investigation—that the standard of care in for-profit homes is vastly inferior to the standard of care in non-profit or municipal homes.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: The NDP government in British Columbia, which was actually recently re-elected—congratulations—introduced liability immunity protection for people, businesses and organizations first through emergency orders in April and June, then entrenched that legislation in July.

When the NDP government there introduced important protection for essential businesses and front-line workers, they said that the purpose of their legislation “is to ensure that, where appropriate, fears of civil liability will not unduly discourage activity that promotes the province's response to and recovery from the pandemic.”

I also notice that the member was going on and on trying to explain the different types of negligence without actually having a legal degree.

So my question to the member is, why do you think that the NDP government in British Columbia did the wrong thing by imposing similar legislation?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I will note that the government of Canada did not call in the Canadian Armed Forces to investigate what was unfolding in BC. We know that there have been almost 9,000 COVID-19 deaths in Canadian long-term-care homes; 2,800 have been in Ontario. British Columbia has seen less than 200.

Speaker, if this government had acted as the BC government did in rapidly increasing staff in long-term-care homes, bringing PSWs under the public employment so that they had wages that would sustain them, so that they had working conditions—so that they were able to help deal with the pandemic within their long-term-care homes—then we wouldn't be in this situation where all of for-profit long-term-care homes are facing lawsuits because of the harm that they inflicted on their residents.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): We don't have time for another question. Further debate?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member from Kitchener–Conestoga during this round.

I've been listening intently to the debate happening today. I just want to pull up an article from CTV News in Ottawa. This article is from October 15. The reason I want to share this article is because I'm hearing a lot about how this legislation is not going to protect people, is not there to support them, and blah blah blah, on and on. Madam Speaker, I'm just going to read this: "Ottawa Woman Breaks 14-day Quarantine Rule to Work at Long-Term-Care Home: Police.

"A 53-year-old ... woman is facing charges under the federal Quarantine Act after Ottawa police say she failed to self-isolate for 14 days after travelling abroad and returned to work at a long-term-care home.

"Ottawa police say information was received indicating that an Ottawa woman had travelled abroad. She returned to Canada on Sept. 26, so she was required under federal law to quarantine for 14 days, until Oct. 9.

"The woman decided not to respect this order and went to work on Sept. 30 at a long-term health facility in Ottawa,' police said.... 'When management was apprised of the situation, she was immediately sent home. The facility immediately activated mitigating self-isolation and cleaning protocols and informed all persons that had been in contact with the subject.'"

So, Madam Speaker, I'm very confused as to why the members opposite are claiming that our government is trying to impose legislation that is not for the people or protecting people when it is literally the exact opposite.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on Ontarians and their communities, including employees, volunteers, charities, non-profits, businesses and public sector organizations. After listening to the concerns of Ontarians, we're introducing legislation that, if passed, would provide liability protection to individuals, organizations and businesses who make an honest effort to follow public health guidance and laws related to COVID-19 so that they can continue providing the services Ontarians need.

Madam Speaker, this is the kind of legislation that's going to help people like Cassandra Greer and everyone else who is associated with the Ottawa Fiddle and Step Dance Association. This legislation is going to protect Jamie Janes from the Metcalfe and District Hockey Association and Peter Dippel and Melanie Mathers from the West Ottawa Ringette Association. This is going to protect people like Mike and Karen Heney, who have been running the Munster Judo Club for decades, it seems, and teach hundreds of kids across the city. This is going to protect people involved with local hockey teams, like the Richmond Royals and the Leitrim Hawks. When it comes to the people of this province, we are here to take care of them, we are here to protect them, and we are here to make sure that they can operate and that they can do what needs to be done as we move forward together during this pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on Ontarians, and that's why we are taking action now. This legislation would be retroactive to March 17, 2020, which was the provincial declaration of emergency. We need to stand up for the people who act in good faith, in accordance with public health guidelines and laws, to make essential contributions to our communities. This legislation will help ensure that businesses like Moncion's in Riverside South and organizations like the Legions, Rural Ottawa South Support Services and other non-profits in my riding of Carleton can continue providing the services Ontarians need.

Over the summer, we listened to health care workers, businesses, grocery and retail store workers, the charitable sector, non-profit organizations, sports associations and sports organizations. Even in my own riding of Carleton, I held several virtual round-table meetings. During these meetings, the feedback I got was clear: People were concerned. The evidence is constantly shifting, and when you're trying your best to do the right thing, it's helpful to know that the government is there to support you. We heard that despite being informed, acting in good faith and taking all prescribed measures, businesses still have concerns about the financial risks that litigation related to inadvertent COVID-19 infection or exposure could pose to their organizations, their employees, their volunteers and their board members—risks that could affect their ability to continue to operate or retain employees.

That's why we're taking action now to support those who make essential contributions to our communities, to ensure Ontarians can continue to access the services they need. This proposed legislation would support Ontario's continued recovery and make sure public health and workplace safety remains the top priority of people and businesses, without unnecessarily punishing Ontarians who make an honest effort to follow the rules.

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In Canada, British Columbia has enacted legislation that protects individuals and businesses from liability for transmission of COVID-19, provided they can prove they followed, or reasonably believe they followed, emergency and public health guidance. In Nova Scotia, the provincial government issued a ministerial direction that protects the long-term-care-home sector if they were acting in accordance with applicable emergency and public health guidance or reasonably believed they were doing so. More than 30 US states have also introduced some type of civil liability for the health care sector, front-line service providers, PPE manufacturers and/or other businesses.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on the people in my riding of Carleton—and not just in Carleton, but across Ontario. With this legislation, Ontarians who are serving their communities can rest assured that they will be protected from liability related to infection with or exposure to COVID-19 when they are acting in good faith and following public health guidelines and laws. We are supporting those who make essential contributions to our communities, from coaching minor sports teams to volunteering at local charities or simply by

showing up to work each and every day despite the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19.

That's why we're making this legislation retroactive. We're making it retroactive in order to protect individuals, businesses, and other organizations who continued to provide essential services to the people of Ontario during the provincial emergency that was declared on March 17, 2020. That is the date the province declared an emergency. I still remember it like it was yesterday. March 17, 2020, fundamentally shifted the way that we are going to operate as a society. March 17, 2020, fundamentally changed how we operate.

More importantly, March 17, 2020, the day that the Premier declared a state of emergency in the province, is the day that Ontarians united together, supported one another and decided to help each other out. They decided to do what's in the best interests of the community. They decided to do what's in the best interests of the people of Ontario. We're all in this together, Madam Speaker, and we are only as strong as our weakest link. I'm so proud that on March 17, 2020, Ontarians stood together to make sure that we can move forward. They supported us when we needed it, and it's our turn as a government to support them. It's our turn to support the hockey coaches, the judo coaches, the dance studios. It's our turn to support farmers, manufacturers, front-line workers, health care workers, grocery store clerks, and Uber drivers. It's our turn to make sure that people can operate without being worried about what might happen. It's our turn to make sure that we are supporting Ontarians as we slowly reopen the economy, and that is why I am proud to be speaking to and supporting Bill 218.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It's our turn now and the government's turn to protect our seniors and our loved ones who died in long-term care. That's what it's time for. But instead, your government—who are they protecting? The lobbyists who registered to lobby the Attorney General. When he said that nobody came to talk to him, it is not, in fact, the case, because on June 1, Brayden Akers, who is the former director of communications to Greg Rickford, registered to lobby the Attorney General on behalf of Sienna Senior Living, which is the subject of multiple class-action lawsuits.

Lauren McDonald, the Premier's former director of marketing, registered to lobby the Attorney General on behalf of Revera. Revera is the subject of multiple class-action lawsuits.

Michael Wilson registered to lobby the Attorney General. He, in fact, at some point, was the chief of staff for the Attorney General. And at that time, the Attorney General, Doug Downey, called him “really my go-to.”

So you can talk about judo coaches, but we know—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Just to remind members to watch and listen for the Speaker, when we're standing.

Back to the member for Carleton.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Madam Speaker, I think if the member opposite actually bothered to read the legislation,

it would be very clear who we are protecting. The immunity in this legislation has only to do with the transmission of COVID-19. It does not protect malnourishment, assault, deprivation of life or other forms of negligence, including a breach of the standard of care, which is a fiduciary duty, or more. Moreover, the Attorney General has made it clear that this legislation is not intended to provide long-term-care homes with immunity in circumstances where the infection with or exposure to COVID-19 was the result of intentional misconduct.

I spoke about the article that was published in CTV Ottawa about the woman who was charged.

Our government will continue to stand up for vulnerable people moving forward, now and in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: What became clear to me—I'm listening to this debate, and I'm listening to the Attorney General introduce Bill 218—is that the members opposite could understand some other jurisdictions in Canada, including the NDP government in British Columbia—congratulations; they won the election, a second term, a couple of days ago. They enacted similar legislation and other measures even a month before us to protect front-line workers.

Can my friend the MPP from Carleton please describe what other jurisdictions have done with respect to civil liability immunity for the transmission of COVID-19 and why Bill 218 is critically needed in Ontario?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I want to thank the member for Markham–Thornhill for his very insightful question.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on Ontarians, and especially on front-line workers. That's why we're taking action now. Like I said, Madam Speaker, more than 30 US states have also introduced some type of civil immunity for the health sector, front-line service providers, PPE manufacturers and other businesses. In Canada, we can look to the NDP government in British Columbia, and in Nova Scotia as well.

I think, ultimately, what's important here is that COVID-19 is not a partisan issue. Quite frankly, I find it shameful that the members opposite are using this as a partisan issue when ultimately we need to be working on keeping people and Ontarians safe, because that is what they expect from us.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: My question to the member for Carleton: Not once did we hear coming out of her mouth the words “long-term-care owners and operators”—not once. And I wonder why she omitted to mention long-term-care owners.

She did say that part of this bill is going to protect the PSWs, is going to protect the soccer coaches—and you could have probably thrown soccer moms in there as well.

My question to her is, if she feels that way, how does she feel about our measures, the NDP measures, to have four hours of hands-on care for the elderly in long-term-care homes—and whether she feels that that would be a benefit for PSWs.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Madam Speaker, I actually did mention the words “long-term care” and I did speak about long-term-care owners, and I spoke about the consequences of not protecting our most vulnerable citizens, so I’m not quite sure what the member is referring to. I think he must have missed the first portion of my debate.

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Furthermore, I am proud to support this piece of legislation. I am proud to put front-line health care workers first. If you want to talk about long-term-care owners, I speak with them all the time, especially in my riding. They ask me questions, and we work together. And I am proud to say that the Osgoode Care Centre, which is a non-profit long-term-care home in my riding of Carleton, did not have a single outbreak. That is thanks to Lori Norris and everyone in that area of the riding who supported our vulnerable seniors.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: Again, it’s always a pleasure to be able to rise here and take part in debate.

To the member from Carleton: I’ve had many people, as I said and that I will allude to later, write into our office and folks I’ve spoken to when we’ve had an opportunity to be on Zoom calls or meeting with people safely in our community about recreational leagues, hockey leagues—also, when we’re talking about grocery store clerks, the people stocking our shelves to keep food on the table for our families, about what this legislation would mean for them. Could you highlight some of those things, please?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I’d like to thank the member from Kitchener–Conestoga for his question.

I actually just got off the phone with Earl Stanley, who is a constituent of mine out in Metcalfe. He owns Stanley’s Olde Maple Lane Farm, which is not just a tourism, wedding and hospitality venue, but it also does a lot of local events. With the changing evidence and the changing situation with the pandemic, he was asking me, “Goldie, what can I do? What can I not do?” His concern is whether or not he can operate, whether or not he can operate safely, whether or not he needs to worry about getting sued—because even though he tried his best to make sure that he’s doing it safely and responsibly, someone might sue them.

This legislation protects people like Earl Stanley and small business owners across my riding of Carleton, Ottawa and Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member opposite from Carleton for her debate.

The government side, the Conservatives, continue to talk about the volunteers, the small businesses, the coaches, the little guy, the little people who volunteered and worked hard for it and how this legislation is going to protect them. I think we’re aligned on that.

The part we have a concern with is long-term care in Ontario. Some 1,907 people have died in long-term care.

If you believe that it’s important to protect the people at the bottom, why not just take the provision for long-term care out of this bill? We’ll be happy to go along with you.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Madam Speaker, we are doing this to make sure that long-term-care homes can operate. We are doing this to make sure that when that PSW goes into work and is dealing with seniors and they’re doing their best to make sure they’re keeping everyone safe, a senior doesn’t turn around and sue them. We are doing this to make sure that the front-line health care workers can operate and do their jobs and protect our vulnerable people and citizens without worrying about whether or not someone is going to sue them and then they go bankrupt and they lose their home or they lose their livelihood.

That is why the provision is in the bill. It is here to protect the people who are on the front lines. If you think otherwise, you need to go back and read the legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): There’s not enough time for another question, so we’ll move to further debate. The member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you for allowing me to rise to speak to Bill 218 today. I’m happy to speak to this bill, because I think it’s one bill that the entire population of Ontario should look at to understand the nature of this Conservative government. If you truly want to understand who this government speaks for and who they cater to, there is no better bill to do it with than Bill 218.

Since COVID-19 hit, almost 2,000 seniors have died in our province—2,000 mothers, fathers, grandparents. Many of them died alone without their families surrounding them in their last moments. Many of them died years before they should have. That’s a national tragedy. But even worse, this death, this pain, could have been avoided if the horrible treatment they were receiving in a long-term-care home was stopped.

Madam Speaker, it took the intervention from the Canadian military and a leaked report from our Armed Forces to shine a light on what was happening in these homes. Activists have been screaming it for years, but it was our Armed Forces who showed the world exactly what these advocates have been saying and what happened. And what did they find? They found rotten food. They found seniors left in spoiled diapers, crying out for help. They found maggots and infestations. They found human urine and feces left in the room.

I hope all the Conservatives stay and listen.

They showed the world what private, for-profit corporations were doing to our loved ones. They showed the world that private companies, for-profit companies—like the one former Conservative Premier Mike Harris proudly sits on the board of—were warehousing our seniors in horrible conditions just to make a profit—as much profit as possible. Think about that, Madam Speaker. Any company that does this to our seniors should pay. They should be hit with every dollar of every fine and every minute of jail time that is allowed by law.

It’s interesting, if you follow the OFL, if you kill a worker in the province of Ontario—

Interjection: You go to jail.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You go to jail. If you kill 2,000 seniors in the province of Ontario, we put laws in place so you can’t be sued. What are we doing here?

Interjection: Shameful.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's absolutely shameful. Anyone who does this to our seniors isn't fit to run a company.

So why does Bill 218 show the character of this government? Because this bill changes the law that allows families to sue these homes. It changes the law to say that these families must not only prove negligence, but now must prove gross negligence.

Not only that—and this really is something that really—I can't say the words I want to use, because the Speaker will stand up and tell me to be quiet. This law now is retroactive. Not only will the families not be able to sue when they find out these companies killed their loved ones through neglect, but cases before the court will be thrown out. That right there shows exactly whose side this government is on.

This bill also protects the government itself. Previously, families could sue this government for failing to inspect these homes. In my opinion, if seniors were dying in their beds, crying out for help, this government is at fault—and so is the previous government before this, the Liberal government. Any government that allowed this to happen should face their day in court. Instead of coming clean and saying they underfunded inspectors, they just changed the law so these families will never see justice.

Not only did you make these families live with the thoughts of their loved ones suffering, but in Bill 218 you are purposely taking away their access to justice—unbelievable. And you know you're doing it. Everybody knows you're doing it. But you won't stop. What does that say about your priorities? And in the middle of a pandemic, with 2,000 seniors dead, you are focusing on legally protecting yourselves and these horrible for-profit homes.

Madam Speaker, we need only look at the government's response to this and see how ashamed they are of what they're doing. Instead of them talking about long-term-care homes, they start talking about community organizations, hockey coaches. They have the power to amend this so that the long-term-care homes are exempt. Yet they won't do it. They won't do it because they're hiding behind our small community groups to pass this law. They start by screaming about British Columbia. We're not talking about British Columbia; we're talking about Niagara and right across the province of Ontario. We're talking about Lundy Manor that I've raised here a number of times, where 21 families had their loved ones taken from them way too soon.

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We're talking about outbreaks that are happening now, today. Are they being neglected? Were their loved ones left in these dangerous situations because their homes refused to pay for proper staffing, supports and PPE for our heroic front-line workers?

If these home operators have nothing to hide, then why are they getting this government to change the law? If they have nothing to hide, why would they be lobbying, even though the government said that they weren't lobbying? Why would they be doing that? Because they know that in

the long-term-care-home facilities, because they didn't provide proper PPE, they didn't provide the proper staffing, and they had groups in their lunch rooms with more than two or three people, as many as 50—they died. They died, my friends—our loved ones. All they went to for-profit long-term-care facilities for—what would they go there for in their senior years? They built our country. Why did they go? Because they wanted to be taken care of. They wanted to stay alive as long as they could. It didn't happen.

Every member on the opposite side will try to deflect this, but none of them will stand up and tell us why long-term-care facilities aren't exempt from this, why the government is covering it up. None of you will tell us why the bill is retroactive, to make it much harder for the cases to go forward. I don't think they will tell us—because they can't possibly come to Niagara Falls, my riding, and look these families in the eye and tell them why their mom or their dad or their grandparents are no longer with us.

That's why Bill 218 tells you everything you need to know about this government. This is supposed to be a bill about supporting our communities. Well, communities in Niagara need help. They need testing support so we can get tests back to people quicker. They need smaller classroom sizes. They need more cleaners. Instead, this government has chosen to spend its time focusing on getting the worst for-profit long-term-care providers off the hook.

Madam Speaker, if this government was listening, they would have acted on the insurance issue I raised last week. In Niagara Falls, we have commercial insurance companies raising insurance rates on businesses by 100% to 150%. They're going from \$6,000 to \$20,000. For some of the hotels in Niagara Falls that provide a lot of employment in Niagara, they're raising their insurance by \$150,000 to \$200,000. And in some cases, they're refusing to insure them.

Let me say this as clearly and loudly as possible: Businesses need help. They want to succeed, but they understand they have a role to play in protecting our society. Businesses need your help to do that. Last week I raised this. Do you know what the government response was? They said it was complicated; that was the answer. Businesses in Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Fort Erie will be gouged out of existence because it's "complicated." News flash: You're the government. You have the staff; you have the lawyers. "It's complicated" is not an acceptable answer. Quite frankly, it's your job. If it's too complicated to figure it out, resign and we'll do it for you. It's not too complicated. I raised the issue of car insurance rates. The minister said, "We will speak to the auto insurance," and that it was hard. Why didn't you speak to the people who were actually paying the rate instead of the greedy companies that are gouging people in the province of Ontario? Why don't you listen to them for a change?

You could pass legislation today in this House that would save these businesses by stopping insurance companies from gouging them, especially during a

pandemic. You cannot just sit there and say, “Well, the industry tells us it’s complicated.” While you’re at it, you might as well say “How high?” when they ask you to jump.

I think my time is up. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Michael Parsa: Thank you very much for the presentation.

Earlier in the debate, my honourable colleague talked about how this bill is not there to help the coaches etc. who we’ve been talking about. I’m pretty sure that he believes that it does.

One of my other colleagues talked about, why are we mentioning this? The reason we are and the reason I am talking about it is because you agree with me about how important these individuals are to our communities—the services they provide, not just to the sporting teams, but the service clubs. I’m thinking of our Legion, for example. The volunteers are very hard to find in the Optimist Club that I’m involved in, for example. It’s extremely difficult to get them. This gives them a level of protection, some comfort in knowing that those who do go above and beyond to respect all the measures will be somewhat protected; the bad actors will not.

That’s my question to you. I’m hoping that you would be able to clarify that.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I’m not sure there was a question there—more of a statement.

I want to be very clear. We want to protect the hockey coach, the dance coach. We’re in agreement there. Where we’re not in agreement is on our long-term-care facilities that, quite frankly, because of their incompetency, were killing our seniors in long-term-care facilities, particularly in for-profit ones. So what we’re saying to you is, take it out of the bill, so that we’re not saying to the private homes that have killed 2,000 people in this thing, “Don’t worry about it.” This is what happened; you guys changed it—and I know I’ve got to talk through you; sorry. What you guys did is, you changed the threshold on how you can sue, and you’ve made it harder to win in the courts of law. That’s what this is really about. The smokescreen, quite frankly, and buying the land in Arizona or wherever you want to buy it, is what you guys are trying to hide behind.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: The second PSW to die of COVID-19 was in Brampton: Arlene Reid. With the passage of this bill, her family now will have no recourse for any justice. This government, if they want to backdate it to March 17—they probably should just backdate it to June 7, 2018, just to cover—well, I can’t say what.

My question to the member for Niagara Falls is, why do you think this Conservative government supports this lousy bill?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you for the question. I think it’s pretty clear why.

We all know, particularly in for-profit long-term care, the boards are all loaded up with Conservatives. That’s the reality. So what they’re trying to do is to make sure their buddies who own these long-term-care facilities where,

over the last 10 years—I don’t know if you know this—\$1.5 billion went to CEOs and shareholders. And where should that money have gone? We’re having our parents and our grandparents die in these long-term-care facilities. Should it have gone to a shareholder or to a CEO? That money should have gone to our parents and our grandparents in the form of more staff and PSWs. It should have gone to make sure we had PPE so that they can protect themselves properly. That’s where the \$1.5 billion went.

You’re asking me why this bill is here? It’s to protect their friends. That’s all it’s about.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: To the member opposite: We share your passion, your concern about what’s happening in long-term-care homes. We’re the first government to actually put in a Ministry of Long-Term Care. I know Minister Fullerton believes passionately about protecting our elders. I certainly wanted to clarify that.

Having said that, I did want to point out that the Ontario Nonprofit Network estimates that one in five of Ontario’s 58,000 non-profits and charities will be forced to shut down if Bill 218 does not proceed.

So my question to you is, what do you say to those charities that may close their doors forever?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I think we’re pretty clear when we talked about charities that we support them in the bill. But that’s not what this is about. It’s nothing more than a smokescreen. This is about making sure these for-profit long-term-care homes that, in my humble opinion—I’m not sure if this is the right word to say, and you can correct me—have killed our grandparents and our moms and dads in these long-term-care facilities. They knew exactly what they were doing. We didn’t need the military to tell you. You’ve been told.

I’m not disagreeing with you; the Liberals did nothing for 15 years. We didn’t need anybody to tell us. But I will say to you that the private for-profits started under the Mike Harris government. That’s where it all started. That’s where, unfortunately, all these problems started, because we all know there is a lot of money to be made in long-term care if you’re not spending where you should.

1640

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I’d like to take this opportunity to say that it’s an honour to serve in this caucus with the MPP for Niagara Falls. You are not going to meet a more honest, passionate, straight-up guy, and it’s my pleasure to work with you. So when he tells you what’s what, you should listen. And really, he’s saying that this bill tells you everything to know about the values of this government. I would say, and I’m going to ask the member if he would agree, that it’s nothing but cowardice to use hockey coaches and not-for-profits and judo coaches and soccer moms as a shield to hide behind what you’re really doing, which is protecting the shareholders, the profitable corporations, the CEOs and you, the government, from any kind of accountability for all of the losses of our seniors in long-term care.

My question to the MPP from Niagara Falls, specifically with regard to a town in your community, Lundy's Lane: Do you agree?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I can probably do that pretty quick by saying yes. I also agree with your opening comments as well. I just want to get that out.

I want to say, on Lundy Manor—and I've raised Lundy Manor here before. It's a retirement home; it's not a long-term-care facility. I can tell you that 21 people died there. Think about this: Two families lost their mom and their dad within 24 hours. I ask anybody over there: Take a look at this bill. Why shouldn't that family that lost a mom and dad within 24 hours—we all know how hard it is to lose a loved one. Imagine losing two in 24 hours that were preventable, because they didn't have proper PPE, they didn't have PSWs, and they were sitting in lunchrooms even though COVID was running rampant in their place. Why shouldn't they have the right to sue?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Vincent Ke: I recall the NDP has been constantly saying, "If we do not give small business more financial relief, they will go bankrupt." So one thing I can assure you is, if any small business has legal proceedings initiated because of COVID, that we didn't protect them. What are you going to suggest to them to do?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you very much for the question. I think what you're raising is small business, and small businesses make up a lot of business. I'm going to be clear with you: For a week, every chance I had to talk up here—I only get a few minutes here, a minute here, a minute there—I talked about insurance in our businesses, that the insurance companies are gouging them and forcing them—it doesn't matter whether it's a restaurant, it doesn't matter whether it's a hotel, it doesn't matter whether it's a small local business that we all go to. They can't stay in business if the insurance companies are gouging them.

I've given you examples. I'm not making this up. I had a call at 12 o'clock today from one of the big hoteliers in Niagara Falls. He said, "Gatesy, the Conservatives have got to help us. They're not helping us." His insurance was going up \$150,000. Their hotels are 80%, 90% empty; nobody is there. They need help with their property tax. They need help with making sure that they can get affordable loans instead of paying 6.5% or 7%. Had the government—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Ask me the question again—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. We don't have time for another question. Further debate? The member for Mushkegowuk—James Bay.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Merci, madame la présidente. J'ai de la misère avec mon masque. Ce ne sera pas long.

Government Bill 218: An Act to enact the Supporting Ontario's Recovery Act, 2020 respecting certain proceedings relating to the coronavirus (COVID-19), to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to revoke a regulation. First of all, I want to start with a question, a serious question: What does meddling in democratic

elections have to do with facing a global pandemic? What else can be said other than this government is attacking the electoral democratic process of Ontario's municipal politics? I said it last week, and I'd like to highlight this again. The Conservative government's decision to meddle in the municipal electoral system may not be a coup d'état, but it's certainly a "coup d'épée" to whatever hopes Ontarians may have had about independent municipal elections, and to whatever hopes Ontarians may have had about electoral reform, transparency and accountability in provincial elections.

The critical point here is the first question I posed: What in the world does meddling have to do with supporting Ontario recovery, respecting certain proceedings, from the coronavirus? We've seen nearly 2,000 seniors die in long-term-care facilities in Ontario, most of them corporate-owned facilities. We are sending our children to schools where the numbers of COVID-19 cases are increasing, with one in 10 schools in the province having at least one positive COVID-19 case.

We are facing a second wave. We are looking at it right in the eye; there's no doubt about it. We saw almost 2,000 cases of COVID-19 during the weekend. And this government thinks that meddling in municipal electoral politics is the way to support Ontario's recovery from a global pandemic?

Prenez deux minutes pour penser à ça, là. Le monde meurt. Il y a près de 2 000 aînés qui sont morts dans les soins de longue durée, un sur 10 cas positifs dans les écoles, puis notre cher gouvernement, comme priorité, s'ingère dans les élections municipales—toute une priorité pour un gouvernement. Ça ne va pas nous aider à dormir le soir, ça.

Je vous pose la question : avez-vous pris le temps de regarder les personnes qui ont perdu leurs êtres chers dans les soins de longue durée? Prends le temps de parler à une famille qui a perdu un être cher. Puis d'être assis là puis nous faisant croire que vous ne protégez pas vos amis—il y a une réalité que vous manquez. Le bateau est passé, ça fait longtemps.

Last week, Martin Regg Cohn, the Toronto Star columnist, wrote a piece titled, "Doug Ford Can't Blame COVID-19 for His Hypocritical Attack on Local Democracy." Let me read a couple of lines from his article:

"Without warning, under cover of COVID-19, Ford's Tories are rescinding the right of municipalities to let voters have the final say over who represents them. It is anti-democratic, it is unilateral, it is underhanded, and it is beneath a Premier who purports to be a populist....

"Why allow local politicians to have their say on masks in mid-pandemic but muzzle their voices when it comes to counting votes," asked Mr. Regg Cohn.

He also writes, "Turns out the" ranked ballots "method was good enough—and democratic enough—for Ford's Tories in their own party leadership race."

The PCs used this very same system to choose their leader—good for me, but not for you.

Faites ce que je dis; ne faites pas ce que je fais.

Of course, this is not the first time that the PCs have taken on municipal politics. We will remember the Toronto council saga and his call for the “notwithstanding” clause, and we have all heard the Premier call for the “united colours” to save Ontario lives. Let me ask you something: If this government’s meddling in municipal politics were a barometer, what’s changed? Here’s the answer: nothing.

People on the other side of the aisle need to understand that there’s a big—a huge—difference between leadership and power. I wish they could understand that, but they don’t. They don’t get that helping Ontarians during the pandemic has absolutely nothing to do with meddling in municipal electoral politics. Nobody asked for that. As we saw in Bill 213, which quietly introduced schedule 2, which gives Charles McVety’s Canada Christian College university status, in spite of McVety’s infamous comments about Islam, same-sex marriage and sex ed and in spite of the fact that the province’s Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board has not yet approved Canada Christian College’s application.

1650

Last week, the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Colleges and Universities, said that his government is “establishing an equal playing field”—maybe he should have said equal paying field—“for our post-secondary institutions to compete and attract world-class talent from around Ontario and abroad.” I really want to know why the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South thinks that including McVety’s college in a bill that is supposed to help Ontarians deal with the economic impacts of COVID-19 favours Ontarians and levels the playing field when it is known that McVety is an avid supporter of the Premier.

The same is the case for Bill 218. COVID-19 has made evident what the NDP has been saying for years: We need to get rid of profit out of long-term care. Recent studies published by the Canadian Medical Association Journal indicated, “There were 190 (30.5%) COVID-19 outbreaks among Ontario’s LTC homes, with 110 (30.6%) occurring in for-profit homes....”

“For-profit status was significantly associated with the extent of the outbreak of COVID-19 in the LTC home ... compared with non-profit status.”

Mais le projet de loi 218 met des bâtons dans les roues afin d’éviter que les résidences de soins de longue durée à but lucratif—où on a vu le plus grand nombre d’éclosions et le plus grand nombre de morts lors de cette pandémie. Il me semble que si le gouvernement avait été intéressé à aider ceux et celles qui ont été atteints de la COVID ou si ce gouvernement avait été intéressé à s’assurer que les entraîneurs et les coachs d’équipe, qui ont aussi le protocole de santé publique, ne soient pas poursuivis en cour, il aurait bel et bien fait ça clair dans ce projet de loi.

Mais au lieu d’avoir des projets visant à aider et appuyer ceux et celles qui se battent chaque jour contre cette pandémie, on ouvre les portes pour les compagnies privées qui font des profits sur le dos des aînés, sur le dos

des préposés aux bénéficiaires—continuer à faire comme si de rien n’était, comme si de rien n’était.

I just want to conclude by saying that if this bill were truly about giving a hand to those gravely affected by the pandemic, there’s simply no reason to meddle with municipal elections, and there’s absolutely no reason—no reason—to shield for-profit long-term-care facilities from liability while hundreds of grieving families are seeking justice for their loved ones.

Quand il y a des centaines de familles qui cherchent la justice pour avoir perdu leurs membres de famille, ils doivent avoir de la misère à dormir de l’autre côté de la Chambre.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: I would put to the member opposite that a lot of people here have talked about some of the troubles we’ve seen in long-term care that are unrelated to COVID-19. Those are atrocities and shouldn’t be happening; I think we can all agree that that is true.

This bill specifically deals with indemnity from gross negligence from a PSW or someone who’s working for a non-profit, or a small business owner or a grocery store clerk, for example, who is doing everything within their power to take all the proper precautions, whether that be—I know we’re not supposed to use props, but wearing a mask, making sure that we’re sanitizing our hands and following all the proper procedures. Why is it that everyone keeps focusing on the things that aren’t included in this bill, but are not looking at what is actually in this bill?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Je dirais à mon collègue de l’autre bord de la Chambre qu’on voit clair. On voit très clair. Puis de dire qu’on ne s’acharne pas—on n’a pas de problème avec ce que vous venez de dire, de protéger les coachs, de protéger les « PSW ». Ça, ce n’est même pas un problème pour les ouvertures. Mon autre collègue vous l’a dit à maintes reprises.

Mais la vérité est exactement—c’est que vous protégez vos amis, vous protégez les grosses compagnies qui ont abusé. Il y a l’abus de pouvoir, puis il y a du monde qui sont morts, puis les familles ne pourront pas—en plus de ça, pire que ça, vous le mettez rétroactif. Vous devez avoir honte, puis vous devez avoir de la misère à dormir, comme j’ai répété à maintes reprises.

Allez voir les familles qui ont perdu les êtres chers. Regardez-les dans les yeux, puis dites que votre projet de loi les protège. Allez les voir, puis dites-leur ça.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

M^{me} Sandy Shaw: Je voudrais poser ma question au député de Mushkegowuk–Baie James, mais je vais la poser en anglais.

To begin with, I would like to say thank you for your passion. It was really important to hear. You did talk about: Why, in a bill to protect people from COVID-19, has this government meddled in elections again? We know that our Premier did say that, really, it was fine in 1867, so we’re just going to keep it the same as 1867. It’s not the first time this Premier has dragged us backwards, and not the last time—le léopard ne change pas ses taches—but

what I want to say is to make clear that in 1867, who had the right to vote? Wealthy, white men had the right to vote. That would probably look like progress to the Premier, but for the rest of the people that had to fight for their right to vote—like women, like First Nations people—how do you think that makes them feel?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Mais définitivement inférieurs, définitivement inférieurs. Moi, j'ai parlé à plusieurs municipalités. J'ai demandé : « Avez-vous demandé pour ça? » Il n'y a personne qui a demandé pour ça. Puis les municipalités ou les villes qui ont pris l'option, elles l'ont fait par référendum. Le peuple avait parlé : « Oui, on va prendre cette option-là. » C'est une option qu'ils ont jugé qu'ils voulaient avoir.

Pourquoi s'ingérer dans les élections municipales? On est dans une crise de pandémie. Nous, de ce côté-ci, on comprend ça. Le monde meurt. Le monde meurt : regardez vos chiffres. Le monde meurt. On a eu près de 2 000 cas dans une fin de semaine, des cas de COVID, puis on s'ingère dans les élections municipales? Puis on dit qu'on a nos priorités à la bonne place? Je m'excuse, mais écoutez donc le peuple. Écoutez vos commettants quand ils vous disent que, non, c'est de l'aide dont on a besoin.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: My question to the member opposite: We've talked about this several times on this side of the Legislature, but what do you say in terms of your response to the one in five charities that would no longer be able to proceed—I think of the ones in my riding—without this change? What do you say to your fellow colleagues in the ridings of Parkdale–High Park, Windsor West, Nickel Belt and Humber River–Black Creek, all of whom have written letters to the Attorney General to ask for said legislation?

We've worked together before to protect workers. Can we work together again to protect our personal support workers, our charities and our volunteers?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Écoute, on s'explique puis on s'explique. Il y a quelqu'un qui m'a déjà dit : « Guy, tu as deux oreilles, une bouche. Tu devrais écouter deux fois plus qu'on ne parle. » C'est une bonne affaire que le gouvernement devrait faire, ça. Pourquoi? Je vais vous dire ça.

C'est depuis tout à l'heure, depuis le commencement, que mes collègues de notre parti nous ont dit, « On n'a pas de problème avec ça. » Oui, il faut protéger ces agences-là. Oui, il faut protéger les coachs. Oui, il faut protéger les Légions. Oui, il faut protéger ça. On n'a pas de problème. On dit exclure la portion des soins de longue durée. Sortez-les de votre projet de loi.

Take it out of it. Take it out of the bill. Take long-term care out of the bill. We don't have a problem with what you just said. Yes, we'll work with you: Take it out. But you're not listening.

Deux oreilles, une bouche : on écoute deux fois plus qu'on ne parle. C'est une très bonne leçon à prendre.

1700

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I've had no family come to me and say that they want to sue a PSW or they want to sue a nurse. But I've had families that have been very concerned about their loved ones catching COVID in their facilities, and they were threatened that if they took their family member out of the facility, there would be no bed, because there is such a long wait-list in our area. They were threatened that there would be no bed for them. They were caught, and they called and they were desperate.

I can understand and support protecting all the people who, through no fault of their own, are there and might be getting a frivolous lawsuit, but I can't understand protecting those who were negligent and people died because of it. So I want to ask my colleague—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Back to the member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Merci à ma collègue. Je sais que dans tes allocutions, tu as parlé du montant de lits. Je peux vous parler de ma région où il y a le Foyer des Pionniers à Hearst. Il y a 66 lits. Il y a 63 personnes qui sont sur la liste d'attente—trois à quatre ans, madame la Présidente, pour avoir un lit. Three to four years to get a bed—and francophone beds are even more limited. And there are designated francophone homes.

Ça fait que, imagine-toi—I can relate to what you're saying. Families are concerned. They would like to take them home, but there is no bed to go back to. Once they're out, they're out. We lived this. My mother is in Wawa. She's living there. We wanted to, but there is no place where she can go.

So, yes, we are very concerned. A lot of people are concerned. That is why we're saying to take that portion out of the bill. We will support what you're saying.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: The member opposite wants to talk about talking out of both sides of our mouth here as government members, and I'll submit to him if there's not a bit of a double standard coming from the other side of the Legislature this afternoon, where everybody over there wants to talk about protecting PSWs. This bill, Madam Speaker, protects PSWs. Why won't they get on board with doing that?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Comme j'ai dit : deux oreilles, une bouche. I guess tu n'as pas compris, tu n'as pas écouté, toi.

Quand je te disais qu'on n'a pas de problème à protéger les « PSWs », quand je te disais, we have no problem protecting coaches—we said that we have no problem protecting organizations. But yet, we're telling you—and we want to work with you; please work with us—take the long-term care out of the bill. It's simple: Retirez ça, then we can say we're working together, because the reality is exactly what we've been saying. You're using these people as shields. You're using them as shields and you put the threshold higher.

Puis après ça, vous dites que vous êtes « transparents »? La transparence, là, on n'a pas la même définition. Transparent, c'est dire les vraies choses. Puis de mettre ça

rétroactif, c'est encore pire. C'est encore pire. Je vous demande, allez voir les—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you.

I'm going to remind all members of the House—it was happening on both sides—that all the conversation goes through the Speaker, not directly back and forth to each other.

Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: It's always an honour to rise and speak on behalf of the constituents of Barrie–Innisfil. I'll be speaking today in support of Bill 218, and I want to direct my remarks to schedule 1 of the bill, the Supporting Ontario's Recovery Act, 2020.

Throughout these unprecedented times, the Premier has frequently talked about all—and I mean all—14.5 million Ontarians working together. He has correctly credited individual Ontarians for responding to the challenge of the coronavirus. As the Premier said earlier on, “We need an army of 14.5 million people.... Whether it's staying home, working in our hospitals or long-term-care homes, or putting food and medicine on our shelves, we're all part of this and with your help we will win this battle and our province and our economy will come back stronger than ever before.”

Speaker, Ontarians have come together—an army of 14.5 million Ontarians. The overwhelming majority of Ontarians have done the right thing. They've made the honest effort to follow the public health laws and the guidelines. Now let us make sure that we provide liability protection to individuals, organizations and businesses who make an honest effort to follow public health guidelines and laws relating to COVID-19 so they can continue providing the services Ontarians so need.

Since March 17, the date of the declaration of emergency, my office and I have received countless phone calls, emails and messages asking for assistance. A large portion of those who reached out were seeking help in how to understand and follow the various regulations, the orders and guidance relating to COVID-19. In March and April, when the situation was very fluid, the rules, for lack of a better word, were changing frequently. We were communicating with lots of constituents. What they wanted was to make an honest effort to follow the public health laws and guidelines. So myself and my office would direct them to various resources, whether it's the Stop the Spread hotline, the local public health unit, the guidance documents prepared by the Ministry of Labour or to the ontario.ca COVID website.

Overwhelmingly, those who reached out to my office did so to understand how the rules are followed. People wanted to do the right thing, whether it was a provincial emergency order, a town or city bylaw, or the public health guidelines from the Simcoe Muskoka Health District Unit. People wanted to act in good faith and make an honest effort to follow the rules.

In April, I held an interactive tele-town hall with my federal colleague the member of Parliament for Barrie–Innisfil, John Brassard. We had nearly 1,000 constituents join the call and listen, and more than 100 entered the

queue to ask questions. As we all recall the situation and what we knew about the virus, it was changing daily. Our government acted quickly. We closed schools; suspended eviction notices and enforcement; launched the Ontario Together procurement portal; provided social service funding and relief; provided electricity rate relief; launched Ontario's Action Plan: Responding to COVID-19, a \$17-billion emergency relief package to provide relief to families and certainty to business; and announced a new penalty to combat price gouging. We did all these things in March, Speaker—March—just in the last couple of weeks of March.

Also in March, this House came together. They came together to pass Bill 186, the Employment Standards Amendment Act, also known as the infectious disease emergencies act, 2020. It was passed in one day, Speaker—one day. As the Leader of the Opposition said in debate on Bill 186, “We can stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of this great province, and we can meet this challenge head on. We can support public health and front-line health care workers. We can make sure every Ontarian has the support they need to make it through this crisis. We can protect our communities and safeguard our economy.”

So today, let's stand shoulder to shoulder. Let us come together to support the front-line health care workers. Let us come together to support the charities and the not-for-profits who deliver valuable services to our communities. Let us come together to support soccer and hockey coaches. And let us come together to protect Ontarians who make an honest effort to follow public laws and guidelines.

I think most Ontarians are doing and have been doing their best to do the right thing throughout the pandemic. Ontarians have listened to Dr. Williams and Dr. Yaffe at the provincial level, and to the various medical officers in their health regions. In Simcoe and Muskoka, Dr. Charles Gardner and the Simcoe Muskoka Health District Unit have provided the best advice they can for the people in their catchment area. This is not to say that Ontarians don't have a healthy skepticism of government, but they do have a healthy respect for expert advice, and they most certainly want to protect their fellow citizens. The Supporting Ontario's Recovery Act will, if enacted, protect virtually all Ontarians. The people who don't benefit are the genuine bad actors who ignore public health guidelines and act with gross negligence.

1710

This summer, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs met for 195 hours and heard from more than 500 witnesses. I participated, as many in this Legislature know, in many of those hearings. One of the key themes the committee heard over and over again was the need for confidence. Businesses thrive on confidence. The more certainty they have, the better they can do. This is true for every sector and for every person.

COVID-19 presented a once-in-a-century series of events: a global health crisis and an economic crisis. It has infected Ontarians and it has killed Ontarians. This is the

nature of this virus. It has changed virtually every aspect of our lives: how we work, how we shop, how we go out to eat. It has affected our mental health. COVID has robbed us—businesses, not-for-profits, governments and individuals—of everything that we’ve become accustomed to. It has robbed us of confidence and it has increased the uncertainty in our society.

It is that uncertainty where we have to keep united and bring hope again to our residents and our citizens. One of those uncertainties, of course, as we talked about, is the legal uncertainty. COVID-19 is a deadly disease that can be easily spread by accident, despite following all public health laws and guidelines.

One of the measures in the Supporting Ontario’s Recovery Act, 2020, is that it provides a great sense of confidence and certainty. This bill provides assurances to a wide range of not-for-profits and charitable organizations. I would like to speak of one of those in my riding that is affected.

Branch 547 has been serving the community of Lefroy and Belle Ewart for 67 years. Branch 547 is the only Legion located in Innisfil. Another Legion branch is 147, which is located in Barrie–Springwater–Oro-Medonte, the riding of our Attorney General. He and I attend many events together at Branch 147, as it serves residents throughout the city of Barrie.

Speaker, our local Legion branches are special places. They are community centres, they hold many meetings and they bring the community together. For instance, our Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs was at the Lefroy Legion for a meeting with farmers and large-animal veterinarians to discuss Bill 156. That was just before COVID-19 had struck. The Legion is a place, you see, Mr. Speaker, for all the community to gather.

Innisfil has a group called the 100 Men Who Give a Damn, and there is also a group called 100 Women Who Give a Damn. They’re both grassroots charities—yes, Mr. Speaker—of people who give a damn, and they meet quarterly to donate their money to various charities in Simcoe county. Often, they are held at the Legion.

You see, Mr. Speaker, most importantly, of course, a Legion is a place that honours veterans, but it is so much more. Branch 547 is home to the Lefroy and Belle Ewart cenotaph. I have laid a wreath there at the cenotaph on behalf of the province of Ontario on two occasions, and while it may be different this year, I will be laying a wreath on their behalf for the year 2020.

Denis Mainville, who actually recently got elected as the president of Branch 547—I wanted to thank him for all his efforts, but also, I’d like to thank Mark Southcott, the past president, and his wife, Beverly, for their service to the community. I appreciate their efforts and dedication to our legion and to the community.

But back to Denis Mainville, who is a veteran of the Gulf War. He was deployed overseas as a mechanic working on Canada’s CF-18 Hornet fighter jet. Prior to assuming the presidency of the branch, he served as sergeant-at-arms. It shows you how much he has done, and he has dedicated his time to the Legion’s poppy campaign.

This bill, as I spoke to Denis about, will help Denis and his poppy campaign, because it will protect him and the Legion from liability.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Thank you to the member for Barrie–Innisfil. Now we will have 10 minutes’ time for responses.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member from Barrie–Innisfil for her 10 minutes regarding schedule 1, particularly, of this bill. I think it’s unfortunate that the member decided not to speak about schedule 2, which affects the Municipal Elections Act. This is, once again, where the Conservative government is meddling in municipal elections and in a municipality’s right to be able to have their say on how they choose to vote. We’ve heard very clearly, and we know historically, as in 2018, that the city of London was able to implement the new rules in having ranked ballots and that it was very successful, and many municipalities across the province have voted in favour of having ranked ballots.

I ask the member: Why does she think that this government has the right to interfere in a municipality’s ability to vote—and why she chose not to speak on that schedule?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: As you heard, I share the city of Barrie with the Attorney General. We both represent the county, Simcoe county. We’ve had many clerks come to our office or send a letter in support. In fact, the Attorney General mentioned in his remarks the other day that he received an email from a clerk that said, “Thank you, thank you, thank you, because we’re spending resources on navel-gazing about how municipal politicians are going to get re-elected instead of helping the citizens of our community in a time of crisis, of COVID-19.” That’s what he said, to the member opposite.

There’s a lot of support that we’ve received, and that email sums up the support we’ve had in our county. Frankly, that’s got a lot of support, so I chose to speak on the part of the bill that is most close to my heart. I fully support the entire bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Daryl Kramp): The member for Mississauga–Lakeshore.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member from Barrie–Innisfil.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that every day I speak with our local community. Someone I speak to on a regular basis is a president of an Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans club, Lu Anne. She’s always worried about what’s going on with COVID-19. She follows every rule that she can and she’s worried that she will end up closing down. What will this bill do to help a person like Lu Anne at the Army-Navy?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Just like your constituent at the Army-Navy, and just like I said about Denis and the Legion’s poppy campaign, it will allow a lot of these charities to get creative, to go out and still be able to maintain their charitable work while, as I was saying, having that confidence that they can continue with that work. They don’t have to be the one in five charities that are going to be closing, because they have that confidence that they can safely go out there without being liable for any people who might potentially contract COVID-19. So

my answer to the member opposite: It means that charity can thrive and continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Daryl Kramp): And the member—

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Thank you, Mr. Speaker—from Brampton North.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Daryl Kramp): —from Brampton North, thank you.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: That's okay, Mr. Speaker.

My question to the member opposite: Likewise, as my colleague just mentioned, I'm surprised she has decided not to speak to the other schedule regarding ranked ballots.

We all know that taking away the option of ranked ballots makes our democracy worse. It reduces the political voices of voters. It reduces the likelihood of new people seeking to serve as elected representatives at the municipal level. It does cost a little bit more to collect more information and more data as to who people support. That is the cost of a strong local democracy.

My question to the member opposite is, why does she feel that her government has the right to meddle in municipal affairs?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Our Attorney General was on county council for many years. The member from Whitby was on council for 13 years. We've got the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who also served on council. I can name countless members in this Legislature who served their communities at the municipal level.

We've heard time and time again that we need to prioritize our communities with what's happening with COVID-19. So again, I reiterate to the member that the email that the Attorney General referred to the other day, where there's not just one thank you, but there are actually three thank-yous in a row—proving that municipalities would rather focus on what matters most to people, which is their communities and helping their communities, rather than adding excessive costs and excessive burdens to those municipalities.

1720

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Daryl Kramp): The member for Hamilton Mountain.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Flamborough—Glanbrook.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Wrong one again? Okay. Flamborough—Glanbrook, carry on.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's ironic you should mention Hamilton Mountain, because as a city councillor, I represented a portion of Hamilton Mountain. I can assure the House that it's very difficult to get people out to vote when you have a confusing process of voting. Back in 2007, Ontario's population rejected—or actually, almost 64% said they wanted first past the post.

To the member for Barrie—Innisfil: Can you try and explain to me why you think our opposition keeps pushing for what the majority of Ontarians have rejected? They want to bring forward something that Ontarians don't want. They've said that they want first past the post. Yet the opposition keeps saying, "We don't want to listen to you. We want something you don't want." Can you try to justify that?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you to the member for her question. Frankly, I don't think we can redo the last election, which clearly showed a majority Progressive Conservative government in the province of Ontario. I can't exactly redo that, Mr. Speaker. But I think we do owe it to Ontarians: We are listening to them with both ears, and we heard loud and clear in terms of the cost.

We've also tried these models across this province. London gets cited many times, as I hear from the members opposite. But we've seen that the results are no different. So why would we be throwing out countless costs—not to mention, as someone who came to Canada and knows many new Canadians, how confusing it can be and the fact that when you're translating things into multiple languages, it could be a barrier. Instead of putting barriers up and adding costs, we're reducing barriers, reducing red tape, making things much easier, allowing municipalities to concentrate on what matters most, which is their communities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Now the member for Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member for Barrie—Innisfil for her debate. All through the debate, every time the Conservative Party talks about this, they mention the Legions, the volunteers, the coaches, the charities; they never talk about long-term care, the amount of deaths in long-term care, the lawsuits for long-term care. I'm concerned that maybe it's because there are nine former Conservative staffers who are now lobbyists for for-profit long-term care. Four of them became lobbyists during COVID-19. We also know that Mike Harris is the chair of a for-profit long-term care and, according to the newspaper, he's sitting on about \$7-million worth of holdings in long-term care.

If we're focused on Legions, volunteers, coaches and charities and not protecting for-profit long-term care, to the member opposite, why not just take that out of the bill and be very clear that it has nothing to do with for-profit long-term care and that it has to do with these institutions that you talk about?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I mentioned these individuals before, but I couldn't look my constituents in the eye, those service PSWs who work in many of these long-term-care homes, and tell them we didn't do everything we could to protect them. I can confidently now stand, with this legislation, and tell those individuals and those workers who are working day in and day out, whether it's in for-profit or not-for-profit long-term-care homes, that we are doing everything we can to protect their rights but also increase their pay and make other substantial changes to make the work of a personal support worker have more dignity in the work, more respect in the work, and make sure that we're bringing forward the reforms that we can be proud of in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): We don't have time for another question, so further debate?

Mr. Jamie West: Speaker, the title of this bill is Bill 218, An Act to enact the Supporting Ontario's Recovery Act, 2020 respecting certain proceedings relating to the

coronavirus (COVID-19), to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to revoke a regulation. The bill is seven pages long. It has two schedules. The first one is about COVID-19 liability—I would argue protecting the liability of the government, protecting the liability of for-profit long-term care. Schedule 2 is about municipal elections—and there has been very little discussion about schedule 2 during debate today.

In fact, I was here on Friday for debate and the Attorney General spoke for an hour—an hour on an eight-page document—and although he said the word “municipal” 13 times, he spoke about schedule 2, the amendments to the Municipal Elections Act, zero times. And so that makes me curious. That brings up a couple of questions. Why would changes to the Municipal Elections Act be part of a COVID-19 recovery bill? It doesn’t make sense. Why, during the lead debate, would the Conservatives choose not to speak to this part of the bill? I’ve heard very little this afternoon. I apologize if I missed a portion when I was in the back. What does ranked ballots for municipal elections have to do with COVID-19—quite frankly, it has nothing.

There has been some evidence that the government was trying to slip this under the radar. I read in the paper—in a couple of papers, actually—that the day before the legislation was tabled and it was rushed to us, officials with the Attorney General provided multiple media outlets with advance copies of the news release: “Here’s what we’re talking about, here’s what the bill is about, and here are the talking points.” None of those advance copies included schedule 2. They just never mentioned it at all. They didn’t even say, “It might be here,” or one line—it had nothing in it at all.

It’s not the first time the Conservative government has used the cloak of COVID-19 to pay back favours or to slide things through that they’re in favour of. If you do a quick Google search, you’ll find many articles that suggest that the Premier is using the response to COVID-19 as a way to advance his own political interests and the political interests of the Conservative Party.

The last bill that we debated, the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act, was supposed to be about COVID-19, but buried in it was a favour for the Premier’s good friend Pastor Charles McVety. I won’t go too far into this because we’ve talked about it already, but Charles McVety has a proven history of making Islamophobic and homophobic statements.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Speaker, point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Stop the clock, please.

Mr. Lorne Coe: The speaker from Sudbury is speaking—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I recognize the member from Whitby on a point of order.

Mr. Lorne Coe: —about another aspect of a bill. We’re on Bill 218, please.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I’m going to remind members to wait for the Speaker to recognize you before you start speaking.

I’m just going to caution the member from Sudbury to make sure that what he’s speaking to is relevant to the bill. Thank you.

Back to the member for Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: I’m going to tie this in and do it very briefly. It has to do with hiding non-COVID-19 things in a COVID-19 bill, such as Bill 218. I would be frustrated, too, if my leader had ties to somebody who had a history of making Islamophobic statements or homophobic statements.

In that bill, they basically said, “Here’s a COVID-19 recovery bill. Also, here’s a favour to my friend.” And now his Canada Christian College will have the power to grant bachelor of arts and science degrees.

Getting back to Bill 218: Currently, the Municipal Elections Act provides a framework for conducting ranked-ballot elections for municipal council. Every time the Conservative government talks about this, they talk about confusion and the cost, but the reality is, even though they mention the three letters of support, there are 444 municipalities in the province. Three out of 444—my math isn’t very good, but it’s a very small percentage.

In schedule 2 of the bill, they have amendments to remove the framework. I don’t think that has anything to do with COVID-19. I can’t imagine, when we sat here all summer long with the 400 deputations, that somebody said, “And also, change the Municipal Elections Act.”

If you look at the Municipal Elections Act, it outlines that municipal offices are for four-year terms. It’s section 6, subsection (1). I won’t go into the details, but it basically says, “Every four years, starting from this date, November 15.” I went to AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. It says that the last municipal election was held on October 22, 2018, basically the fall after our election. The next municipal election is scheduled for Monday, October 24, 2022. It’s currently October 2020, Speaker. They’re rushing in a bill to stop a municipal election that’s going to happen two years from now, under the guise that it’s going to protect us from COVID-19—that it will help us recover from COVID-19. I can’t imagine anyone ever said, “Municipal elections are where I need you to focus on as a government.”

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing provided a written statement. He said, “Now is not the time for municipalities to experiment with costly changes to how municipal elections are conducted,” and that 443 out of the 444 municipalities will see no change. I don’t understand that logic.

1730

Currently, there is one riding, London—no, one city; I apologize. They already have this new system. They paid for it. They did the consultations. They listened to their citizens. In 2018 they rolled it out, and they were the first one. So instead of saying, “I’ll save you money,” what they’re telling the citizens of London is, “Now you have to switch back. It’s going to cost you more, plus whatever you’re doing with COVID-19.”

Toronto was also working towards doing this in the next election, but Toronto announced they’re not going to.

I would argue that any municipality that was looking into this, in the midst of COVID-19—because city councillors are smart and mayors are smart—would say, “Now is not the time.” They don’t need the provincial government to act as Big Brother and tell them what to do. They can manage it themselves. And they would say, “Let’s not do it now. It’s not the time.” You don’t need the iron fist to pound down on them.

What’s frustrating out of this is that the bill comes in with no compensation and no support, so London is out of pocket. The other municipalities that were looking into this are out of pocket for what they paid for in terms of consultation and feedback. But that doesn’t matter to this government as long as they get their way.

We know it’s not the first time the Conservatives meddled with a municipal government. It’s weird, Speaker. I think maybe the Premier should have run for mayor—I apologize; the Premier did run for mayor. He wasn’t successful. He has to realize he is the Premier of the province and not just the Premier of Toronto. After being elected, the Conservatives announced they were going to override Toronto’s city council plans, originally to make them larger, but ultimately they decided to make them smaller, cut them in half. Then, they scrapped plans to let voters directly elect regional chairs. And now this comes in in the midst of a COVID-19 bill. It’s ridiculous, and it’s weird. It’s really weird. I can’t imagine anybody—sadly, I’m going to run out of time.

This was done with zero public consultation. Time and time and time again the provincial government, the provincial Conservatives, tell cities, “We know what’s best for you as citizens. We’ll tell you how to choose your leaders. We’ll tell you what’s best to do.” Even more bizarre, when they say, “It’s confusing, and we don’t want to confuse people”—it’s not confusing; it’s really, really simple. London did a great job. And your own party, the way the Premier got elected—the way all of our leaders get elected is ranked-ballot systems. It’s not super confusing. Ontarians are smart. Frankly, it feels anti-democratic.

Martin Regg Cohn, who is a reporter—I think he summarized it best with this quote: “Ford’s decision to kill the ranked ballot is an unwelcome reprise of the old, pre-pandemic Premier who defied democratic norms in his first 100 days in power. It ranks right up there with his wrong-headed, muddle-headed meddling in municipal democracy when he slashed the size of Toronto’s city council in half in mid-campaign—and threatened to override any judge who overruled him via the ‘notwithstanding clause’ of the Charter of Rights.”

Do you remember, before COVID-19, when we weren’t allowed to come to work because you had us rise the Legislature till after the federal election because the popularity was so low? Do you remember, during the Raptors’ parade, when the Premier got booed? That’s what we’re going back to. We had to reset the clock. We had shown we could work together and be reasonable. In this bill—we’d love to support schedule 1 if you’d take the long-term care out of it, if you’d take the crown out of it

and you would just support the soccer moms and the coaches and the veterans and the Legions like you said you will. But you don’t. It has nothing to do with people; it has to do with protecting your wealthy and well-connected friends every single time. The people of Ontario are not falling for it anymore. They see right through you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Michael Parsa: My question to my colleague is quite simple, actually, and we’ve talked about this earlier—British Columbia and other jurisdictions have enacted similar legislation. Four of your members have asked us for the protection of our coaches, as has been noted in their request. Do you support your members and the government of British Columbia? Do you not think that this legislation will protect the people we have talked about—and it’s not just coaches. I referenced earlier the service clubs, for example, the Legion halls—all of those volunteers who are so vital to our local communities. Could you address that, please?

Mr. Jamie West: I think it’s a good question.

Earlier, they brought up BC versus Ontario. Ontario has 10 times the number of long-term-care deaths that BC does. I’m not familiar with the legislation, aside from the brief overview I saw. I don’t know the ins and outs. But if I was in BC and they said, “Let’s protect the long-term-care providers, the for-profit ones that have high rates of death and have lawsuits going on,” I think I’d argue against it.

Frankly, at the end of the day, I don’t have a voice in BC. I was elected in Ontario to represent the people of Ontario. I was elected to represent the people of Sudbury, and the people of Sudbury don’t want negligent long-term-care providers being protected by this government.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I sat on the finance committee, and we did hear hundreds of hours of testimony from people. Not one single time did they say, “What I would like you to do, what is a priority for businesses struggling to keep their doors open is that, in fact, instead of providing us support, you protect shareholders, profitable corporations or CEOs.” I didn’t hear that. I also didn’t hear the issue of ranked ballots being confusing or that it was a priority.

It’s not the first time that we’ve seen the Premier take us backwards. We are trying to move forward to see progress in democracy so that we can include people in our democracy. I think it’s important to note that 1867 seems to be a good year for the Premier, but in that time women did not have the right to vote, First Nations did not have the right to vote, Black people did not have the right to vote. In fact, First Nations did not get the right to vote until 1954.

Can you explain to the House why this statement from the Premier would be insulting to people who see this as democratic progress that they would welcome?

Mr. Jamie West: I think the member brings up a good point on progress.

I won’t be able to pull it out of my notes in time to respond—but there was a quote from a councillor who said, “I think that the ranked-ballot system is a bad idea,

but I support the right of citizens and municipalities being able to choose it.” That’s what the heart of this gets to: the ability for more people to run; the ability of better democracy and open debate; the ability of citizens in their cities being able to pick who represents them at the city without the province saying, “No, no, we’ll tell you how you pick them.” That’s what’s wrong about this.

Thank you again for the question.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is to the member for Sudbury. The name of this act, Bill 218, is Supporting Ontario’s Recovery and Municipal Elections Act. Our government is capable of doing two things at one time. We included the Municipal Elections Act. It just happened to go with the Supporting Ontario’s Recovery Act. We’re capable of doing that. It may be something foreign to the opposition, but we are capable of doing that.

In 2007, Ontarians said they wanted first past the post—64%. Do you not believe, as an elected official, that you should respect what Ontarians have agreed they wanted? Do you want to spend more of taxpayers’ hard-earned money during a pandemic to raise something that nobody wants?

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member opposite on this.

In 2007, Ontario thought they wanted a Liberal government, and they don’t have that any more. In 2022, they’re going to realize they don’t want a Conservative government any more and they’re going to vote in the NDP.

What I support, Speaker, is people having a voice to choose who they want. The government pretends that this bill is about protecting citizens. What this does is muzzle citizens from having a voice. If in 2006, they said they want first past the post and then in 2007, they said they don’t, then that’s the majority’s voice and that’s how democracy works. It isn’t the government telling citizens what they want; it’s the government listening to citizens and doing what they say.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Question?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: It’s obvious what’s going on here. This government is putting through this piece of legislation as a ruse to what’s really going on. They don’t want to talk about long-term-care homes, as well as all the great—well, I’m not going to say “great” because they’re not great, so I’m going to stop right there. Let me just get right into it. We see what’s going on with this government here.

1740

My question for the member for Sudbury is: Having the government meddle in municipalities at this time, when of course we have COVID-19 going on, not just in Ontario but right around the world—why do you think this government decided to sneak it into the bill when what we should be doing, obviously, is worrying about what’s going on in terms of long-term-care homes, protecting our elderly and protecting the people of Ontario?

Mr. Jamie West: I think it’s a great question.

When I talk to the people of Sudbury, what they tell me they want is rent relief for business, rent relief for

residents. They tell me what they want is someone to take care of the skyrocketing insurance rates. They tell me they want better controls in long-term care and more hours of hands-on care. Not one of them said, “We need to look at the Municipal Elections Act for an election that’s coming in two years.” Not one of them said, “We need to protect the crown in case they make mistakes. We need to protect long-term-care facilities in case they cause wrongful deaths.”

They’re missing the point with this bill. Unfortunately, Speaker, the Conservatives seem to believe that the people of Ontario can’t figure this out, that they’re too dumb to see through the charade. That’s embarrassing and unfortunate for the citizens of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: My question is to the member from Sudbury. You mentioned that the citizens of Ontario can’t “see through.” If I recall, there was an election in British Columbia a few days ago, and I believe that the NDP got a majority government, who passed through legislation similar to this. Are you saying that the people of BC can’t see through this legislation?

My question to you beyond that is with respect to the Ontario Nonprofit Network. You’ve probably heard of this organization. They are focused on non-profits throughout Ontario. The belief is that one in five not-for-profits will not be here in a year if we don’t pass Bill 218. In fact, they said, “The Ontario government introduced legislation to provide liability protection for non-profits and charities that make an honest effort to follow ... health guidelines and laws relating to exposure to COVID-19.” My question to you is, why wouldn’t you support this?

Mr. Jamie West: I feel like we’re seeing the same thing again. Every member on this side of the House, every New Democratic member, has said that we do support protecting the charities and non-profits, the Legions, the soccer moms, the dance coaches. We support all of these people. What we don’t support is, if the crown was negligent or if long-term-care facilities were negligent in causing deaths, they should not be held to a higher standard.

Let’s be very frank about this: If I provide first aid to somebody on the side of the road who has broken their leg, and somehow, because I haven’t washed my hands properly, it gets infected and they’re hurt, I’m protected by a good Samaritan clause, because that’s the level of care that I’m expected to have. If a doctor in a hospital causes an infection and you lose your leg, there’s a higher standard, because it’s a hospital. What we’re saying is, you don’t take the hospital—or, in this case, the long-term care—and minimize it down to the average citizen, the Legion, the volunteer or the not-for-profits.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): We don’t have time for another question.

Further debate?

Mr. Mike Harris: As we get into the wee hours of our legislative evening, it’s great to be able to participate today. I do appreciate this opportunity, as I said, to rise this afternoon and participate in debate on Bill 218, the Supporting Ontario’s Recovery and Municipal Elections

Act, which delivers on critical items that I've heard from local organizations and businesses in my riding; chiefly, civil liability immunity for inadvertent transmission of COVID-19.

Across the province, grocery store owners, retail workers, not-for-profits and sports organizations have voiced concerns to me about the costs of legal consequences they could face if someone were to get COVID-19 within their establishment or under their watch, even if they made honest efforts to follow public health guidelines and laws. Over the summer, our Attorney General and government listened to health care workers, businesses, the charitable sector and recreational organizations, and what we heard is directly built into this bill.

If passed, Bill 218 would provide reassurances and some level of protection to people and organizations that, again, make honest efforts to follow public health guidelines and laws. It would mean that a grocery store owner who honestly believes she is following the guidelines and is acting in good faith to take precautions as advised by public health would have greater protection from civil liability.

COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact of all aspects of life in Ontario. Our businesses have had to temporarily close. Our charities have found themselves having to adjust their operations to the new normal. Sports and recreation have been heavily impacted. We have introduced this legislation to protect them as we move forward. The contents of this bill would support the people who are making essential contributions to our communities. It also ensures Ontarians can still take—and I say that again, can still take—legal action in cases of gross negligence or intentional misconduct, or for any other matter that is unrelated to the exposure to or infection from COVID-19.

I want to touch on a few other actions the Attorney General has taken over the past year that have allowed for our court systems to continue to function even in the midst of a pandemic. While COVID-19 has limited in-person court appearances, the Superior Court of Justice and Ontario Court of Justice have still heard matters using video and teleconferencing. Between March 16 and the beginning of the reopening of courtrooms in July, over 21,000 calls were facilitated remotely.

Prior to COVID-19, the Attorney General introduced the Smarter and Stronger Justice Act to simplify and modernize outdated court systems. He made electronic filing for more than 400 civil and Family Court documents available online. Working with his partners, the Attorney General was able to move the justice system forward in a matter of months through game-changing modernizations. His most recent piece of legislation before the House, the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act, if passed, will make further changes to solve family law matters faster before the courts.

This legislation would prevent our courts from becoming overwhelmed by prioritizing the most serious COVID-19 lawsuits and claims against those that have not acted in good faith.

I want to spend some time discussing what this legislation, if passed, would not do, because we're hearing a lot of things from the opposition members today, so I want to provide some clarification. First, this bill would not apply in cases where COVID-19 transmission was a result of gross negligence on the part of an individual corporation—again, corporation—or other organization. It would not apply to businesses that were ordered to close and did not do so—sorry, Madam Speaker; it would apply to those businesses. It would also not be applicable to cases that are unrelated to COVID-19, such as product liability, medical negligence, failures to provide the necessities of life, fraud or any other type of negligence that we are hearing from the members opposite here today.

This legislation has nothing to do with those things. What it does is provide safety for PSWs, it provides safety for grocery store clerks, and it provides safety for our sports organizations.

It would also not interfere with the ability of a worker who is not covered by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, and they would still be able to take action against their employer if they were exposed to COVID-19 or if they were infected with said disease. For those that are covered under the WSIA, their compensation through WSIB would not be impacted.

To be absolutely clear, any bad actors who are negligent or failed to make an honest effort to follow COVID-19 guidelines and rules will still be held to account.

I just had the opportunity, along with the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues, to visit several community service organizations in Waterloo region to see how they are continuing to operate during the pandemic. Their leadership and volunteers are working day in and day out, and I am very happy to see our Attorney General including them in this legislation. Because I can say after meeting with their teams that they are taking safety precautions very seriously and balancing that with the need to continue serving our communities.

One of the organizations we visited was Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region. I mention this visit because one of their neighbouring organizations, Family Services Perth-Huron, wrote our Attorney General requesting this legislation, Madam Speaker. In their letter they requested, and I quote, "Immediately pass an emergency order providing good Samaritan COVID-related liability protection to non-profits if they have followed all public health guidelines in order to avoid catastrophic loss and damage to our organization."

She continues: "Many non-profits have barely survived the opening phases of the pandemic only to find themselves struggling to operate or reopen because of skyrocketing insurance costs, COVID-related exclusions, and an excessive burden of liability falling on volunteer boards of directors."

Well, I am pleased to share with Debby that what she has asked for is what we are doing here today. This bill is going to help many organizations, such as Trinity Village. It's going to help all non-profits, all the service organizations out there that are finding themselves struggling, Madam Speaker.

Our sport and recreation organizations have also found themselves in a very difficult spot. I've had a chance to speak with Phillip McKee, executive director of the Ontario Hockey Federation and a proud resident of Waterloo region. The Ontario Hockey Federation is the largest member of Hockey Canada and is one of three governing bodies for amateur hockey in Ontario.

I am a huge supporter of amateur sport, as we've talked about here today. As a father of five, I know how important an impact sports have on the lives of our children. Phillip shared a letter with me that he also sent to the Premier and the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism, and Culture Industries, both of whom I know are just as passionate about amateur sports as I am. He writes, "COVID-19 has created an insurance liability concern for many players, staff, parents and volunteers within our game that in many cases is preventing a return to play in Ontario. The hockey community needs the help of the provincial government to eliminate the increased liability issue to ensure that organizations can make the decision to return to the ice and provide a venue for physical activity within the government guidelines without fear of reprisal."

Imagine, Speaker, if the fear of being sued for transmission of COVID-19 kept hockey teams off the ice. Think about what that would mean to the young players, many of whom learn teamwork, leadership skills, and confidence from that game, Madam Speaker.

With that, I wholeheartedly support this bill, and I ask that the question now be put.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Mr. Harris has moved that the question now be put. I am satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion that the question now be put, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion that the question now be put please say "nay."

In my opinion the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, unless I receive a deferral slip, the bells will ring for 30 minutes during which time members may cast their votes. Prepare the lobbies.

Pursuant to standing order 30(h), I request that the vote on closure for second reading of Bill 218, An Act to enact the Supporting Ontario's Recovery Act, 2020 respecting certain proceedings relating to the coronavirus (COVID-19), to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to revoke a regulation, be deferred until deferred votes on Tuesday, October 27, 2020.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): It being close to 6 o'clock, this House now stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1754.

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| Gélinas, France (NDP) | Nickel Belt | |
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| Kusendova, Natalia (PC) | Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre | |
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| Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP) | Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre | |
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| Mantha, Michael (NDP) | Algoma—Manitoulin | |
| Martin, Robin (PC) | Eglinton—Lawrence | |
| Martow, Gila (PC) | Thornhill | |
| McDonell, Jim (PC) | Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry | |
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| McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC) | Lambton—Kent—Middlesex | Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences |
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| Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP) | Thunder Bay—Atikokan | |
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| Sandhu, Amarjot (PC) | Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest | |
| Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC) | Brampton South / Brampton-Sud | Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associé délégué au dossier des Petites Entreprises et de la Réduction des formalités administratives Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille |
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| Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC) | Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock | Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure |
| Shaw, Sandy (NDP) | Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas | |
| Simard, Amanda (LIB) | Glengarry—Prescott—Russell | |
| Singh, Gurratan (NDP) | Brampton East / Brampton-Est | |
| 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 | |
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| Vanthof, John (NDP) | Timiskaming—Cochrane | Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle |
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