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Lundi
29 novembre 2021

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Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Monday 29 November 2021 / Lundi 29 novembre 2021

Report, Financial Accountability Officer

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott) 1249

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

Child care

Mr. Chris Glover 1249

Mental health and addiction services

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff 1249

Road safety

Ms. Suze Morrison 1249

Diabetes

Mr. Deepak Anand 1250

Environmental protection

Ms. Sandy Shaw 1250

Government services

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne 1250

Child care

Mr. Will Bouma 1251

Road safety

Ms. Marit Stiles 1251

Paint the Town Red

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto 1251

Clerk of Procedural Services

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott) 1251

QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

COVID-19 response

Ms. Andrea Horwath 1252

Hon. Christine Elliott 1252

Hon. Paul Calandra 1252

Highway tolls

Ms. Andrea Horwath 1253

Hon. Caroline Mulroney 1253

COVID-19 response

Ms. Marit Stiles 1254

Hon. Stephen Lecce 1254

Economic reopening and recovery

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff 1254

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy 1255

Long-term care

Mr. Tom Rakocevic 1255

Hon. Paul Calandra 1255

COVID-19 response

Mr. John Fraser 1256

Hon. Paul Calandra 1256

Hon. Christine Elliott 1256

Northern economy

Mr. Norman Miller 1256

Mr. Dave Smith 1257

Public safety

Mr. Michael Mantha 1257

Hon. Paul Calandra 1257

COVID-19 response

Mr. Roman Baber 1258

Hon. Christine Elliott 1258

Anti-racism activities

Ms. Natalia Kusendova 1258

Hon. Parm Gill 1258

Child care

Ms. Suze Morrison 1259

Hon. Stephen Lecce 1259

Child care

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne 1260

Hon. Stephen Lecce 1260

Environmental protection

Ms. Sandy Shaw 1261

Hon. David Piccini 1261

COVID-19 response

Mr. Roman Baber 1261

Hon. Christine Elliott 1261

Autism treatment

Ms. Peggy Sattler 1262

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton 1262

DEFERRED VOTES / VOTES DIFFÉRÉS

Rent Stabilization Act, 2021, Bill 23, Ms. Bell; Mr. Harden; Ms. Karpoche; Mr. Kernaghan / Loi de 2021 sur la stabilisation des loyers, projet de loi 23, Mme Bell; M. Harden; Mme Karpoche; M. Kernaghan

Second reading negated 1263

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES / RAPPORTS DE COMITÉS

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills

Mr. Aris Babikian 1263

Report presented 1263

Standing Committee on General Government

Mr. Mike Schreiner	1263
Report adopted	1263

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI****1664503 Ontario Inc. Act, 2021, Bill Pr53, Mr. Coe**

First reading agreed to.....	1263
------------------------------	------

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS**Special-needs students**

Ms. Marit Stiles	1263
------------------------	------

Autism treatment

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell	1263
-----------------------------------	------

Special-needs students

Mr. Chris Glover	1264
------------------------	------

Special-needs students

Mr. Tom Rakocevic	1264
-------------------------	------

Child care

Ms. Marit Stiles	1264
------------------------	------

Anti-racism activities

Mr. Chris Glover	1265
------------------------	------

Addiction services

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell	1265
-----------------------------------	------

Animal protection

Ms. Marit Stiles	1265
------------------------	------

Child care

Mr. Chris Glover	1265
------------------------	------

Nurses

Mr. Michael Mantha	1265
--------------------------	------

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR**Working for Workers Act, 2021, Bill 27, Mr.
McNaughton / Loi de 2021 visant à oeuvrer pour
les travailleurs, projet de loi 27, M. McNaughton**

Mr. Stephen Crawford.....	1266
Mr. Tom Rakocevic	1268
Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto	1268
Mr. Wayne Gates	1268
Mr. Michael Parsa	1268
Mr. Joel Harden.....	1269
Mr. Sam Oosterhoff	1269
Mr. Wayne Gates	1269
Mr. Lorne Coe.....	1272
Mr. Tom Rakocevic	1273

Mr. Norman Miller.....	1273
Mr. Joel Harden.....	1273
Mr. Stephen Crawford.....	1274
Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto	1274
Vote deferred.....	1275

Throne speech debate

Mr. Gilles Bisson	1276
Mr. Lorne Coe	1277
Mr. Michael Mantha.....	1277
Mr. Sam Oosterhoff.....	1278
Mr. Tom Rakocevic.....	1278
Mr. Stephen Crawford.....	1278
Mr. Chris Glover	1278
Mr. Norman Miller.....	1279
Mr. Chris Glover	1281
Mr. Sam Oosterhoff.....	1282
Mr. Tom Rakocevic.....	1282
Hon. Parm Gill	1282
Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell	1283
Mr. Joel Harden.....	1283
Mr. Wayne Gates	1286
Mr. Sam Oosterhoff.....	1286
Ms. Peggy Sattler	1287
Mr. Stephen Crawford.....	1287
Mr. Chris Glover	1287
Hon. Michael A. Tibollo	1288
Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell	1290
Mr. Norman Miller.....	1291
Ms. Sandy Shaw	1291
Mr. Michael Parsa	1291
Mr. Michael Mantha.....	1292
Mr. Jeff Burch	1292
Mr. Sam Oosterhoff.....	1295
Ms. Sandy Shaw	1295
Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell	1295
Mr. Chris Glover	1295
Mr. Bill Walker	1296
Mr. Mike Schreiner	1296
Mr. Norman Miller.....	1297
Ms. Sandy Shaw	1297
Mr. Sam Oosterhoff.....	1298
Mr. Jeff Burch	1300
Mr. Lorne Coe	1300
Ms. Marit Stiles	1301
Mr. Chris Glover	1301
Mr. Will Bouma	1301
Mr. Chris Glover	1302

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 29 November 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 29 novembre 2021

The House met at 1015.

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

Prayers.

REPORT, FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Before I ask members for their statements, I beg to inform the House that the following document has been tabled: a report, entitled Expenditure Monitor 2021-22: Q2, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CHILD CARE

Mr. Chris Glover: Global News recently reported that Wendy LaRose, a parent and lead of Toronto Parents for Childcare paid \$2,000 a month for infant care.

Tegan Nguyen, a parent in my area, says, "As a young immigrant woman and ECE, I cannot afford to" both raise my children "in Toronto or do the child care work I love."

Mr. Speaker, we are in the midst of a she-cession. The pandemic rolled back women's employment rates to 1998 levels. But in Quebec, where they have \$10-a-day child care, women's employment rates are almost back to pre-pandemic levels.

Registered early childhood educators Hollis Pearson and Maame Ataa-Adwubi say, "Affordable \$10-a-day child care will allow families to continue working."

Allison Papageorgakopoulos says, "For our family, with four boys under the age of eight, it would mean I could go back to work."

Sinéad Rafferty, an ECE and parent, says, "As a single mother, it would mean not having to decide between affording my rent or child care."

Andrea Prifti, a child care operator, says, "I know many families struggle a lot with the current funding formula."

Meike vanGerwen, an ECE, says that the government "signing the deal would mean a decent wage for ECEs."

My question to the government is, will you please, please sign the child care deal so that the women of Ontario can recover financially from this pandemic?

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Every year more than a million Ontarians experience challenges with mental health and

addictions. Many of us know a friend, a family member or a colleague who struggles with mental health, and we know mental health is just as important as physical health.

As part of our province's strategy to address mental health, I was pleased to join my colleagues Minister Tibollo and MPP Barrett at the beginning of November to announce a new mobile mental health and addictions clinic in rural Haldimand-Norfolk and Niagara. Access to quality care can be a challenge for individuals living in remote, rural and underserved communities across Ontario. Instead of asking patients to travel long distances for critical care, we will bring them the care they need.

1020

This partnership will provide mental health and addictions services in Niagara West through a multidisciplinary team of clinical therapists, social workers and nurses who will travel to the communities that need them, providing more clients more care in more places. The mobile clinic will provide local clients with a variety of services under one roof, including intake and brief services, referrals to existing services, and psychiatric support and follow-up.

As the clinic operates within a custom-built, retrofitted bus, it reduces the need for people to travel to find services. Through the development of this mobile mental health and addictions clinic, clients and families in my riding of Niagara West will have greater access to high-quality, evidence-based care, in a setting where they are fully supported on their journey towards recovery.

Speaker, our government is committed to the Roadmap to Wellness and bringing healing to those who are hurting through this important project.

ROAD SAFETY

Ms. Suze Morrison: Two weeks ago, my community in Toronto Centre lost Christine, a well-known community member who was hit by a cement truck at the intersection of Sherbourne and Dundas. Christine was 59, Indigenous, homeless, and used a wheelchair.

A worker who saw the crash, Sarah, told my office, "This is a really busy corner that has vulnerable people all the time. The people who live here already feel their lives are disposable, and they watched the undignified and inhumane way that Christine's body lay on the street for hours before the cement truck was removed. Why has nothing been done to protect people in our community?"

In the coming weeks, the Toronto Ghost Bike project will be installing a ghost wheelchair at the intersection in Christine's honour.

Unfortunately, deaths like Christine's are becoming far too common in all of our communities. In June 2019, we

also lost Ismathara Ratna, a mother of three in Regent Park who was killed in a hit-and-run. She was walking to visit a friend when an impaired driver lost control of his vehicle, mounted the curb and took the life of a beloved community member. We need to ensure that communities are safe for vulnerable road users—for pedestrians, for cyclists, for children and for vulnerable people—because there are now three children in Regent Park who will grow up without their mother, because this government refuses to prioritize road safety.

Today I'm calling on all members of this House to work swiftly to pass the vulnerable road users act, for Christine, for Ismathara and for the many others we needlessly lost.

DIABETES

Mr. Deepak Anand: In Ontario, 1.5 million people have diabetes, and in the region of Peel, often called the diabetes capital, one in six residents are affected by diabetes. While the impacts of diabetes are concerning, there are multiple ways to manage the impact and, in many cases, prevent it from occurring.

Education and awareness play an important role to understand the symptoms and the causes of diabetes. Healthy outcomes can result from simple lifestyle changes, including nutrition, increase in physical activity and taking medication to monitor blood sugar levels. It is important to become aware of the risk and get tested.

I would like to give a shout-out to Diabetes Canada and educators like Bonnie Loranger, Amber Khalid from Four Corners Health Centre and Anterpreet Dhaliwal from William Osler Health System for ensuring residents have tools and supports like virtual care to reduce their risk of developing diabetes during this pandemic.

To support residents living with diabetes, starting November 30, the government will provide free access to the FreeStyle Libre system to all eligible Ontarians over the age of four. The sensor-based technology will help to monitor glucose levels through the phone and without the use of finger-pricks.

Speaker, I'm proud to share that in 1921, Dr. Frederick Banting discovered insulin right here in Ontario. His breakthrough invention went on to save millions of lives and resulted in better treatment. November marks Diabetes Awareness Month. Let's work together to ensure our province remains a leader in providing accessible, high-quality diabetes care to individuals in need.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Speaker, last week I was asked a remarkable question by the press: Does Ontario even have a Minister of the Environment? In the wake of last week's damning Auditor General report, this is a fair question. These reports show yet again that this government, and in particular the Minister of the Environment, are failing at their core mandate, which is to keep Ontarians and their communities safe.

Two years ago, I rose in this House to share the outrage of my hometown at the news that 24 billion litres of raw sewage spilled into Cootes Paradise for over four years. No one—not the city of Hamilton, not the Ministry of the Environment, no one—let Hamiltonians know. I filed a freedom of information request regarding the spill with the Ministry of the Environment. After two years, my community has still not been provided answers.

Hamiltonians know we need action to prevent future spills. That's why I introduced my bill, the Cootes Paradise Water Accountability Act. This is to ensure spills are properly and publicly reported and that no community would ever be left in the dark again like Hamilton was. But instead of working with me to pass my bill, this government did nothing. Now the Auditor General is calling for changes similar to those in the bill I introduced two years ago.

After years of ignoring Hamilton, the answer to the question is clear: No, this province does not have a Minister of the Environment, certainly not one that will work to keep Ontarians and their environment healthy and safe.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: In June 2011, I got an unusual call from one of my family members. My niece, Amy, called me to thank me tearfully for something the government had just announced—not an everyday occurrence for a politician, Mr. Speaker. Amy's disabilities mean that she will never drive, so of course she will never qualify for a driver's licence, which meant that she had a constant and irritating problem producing government-issued ID when asked. Amy was one of about 1.5 million people in Ontario at the time who were in need of an alternative to a driver's licence.

She was calling me because I was the Minister of Transportation at the time and we had just introduced the Ontario photo ID card. Speaker, the card was intended to allow people who could not or chose not to drive in Ontario the same dignity as drivers. But it turns out, Speaker, that holders of the photo ID card are not being accorded that same dignity when it comes to using this government's online services.

A friend of mine alerted me to the issue that the OHIP card's online renewal service is only available to people holding an Ontario driver's licence. The Ontario photo ID card is not accepted. Everyone else is expected to do the renewal in person. As my friend said to me in her email, "People with mobility issues? Visual impairments? Dementia? Maybe immunocompromised? And in a pandemic? It makes zero sense that you can use the card in person and not online."

The member for St. Paul's has raised this issue and is calling on the Ontario government to make the OHIP card's online renewal more inclusive by making it available to all eligible residents, including those who do not drive. Speaker, I join with the member for St. Paul's in her call for the government to fix this. When Amy called me in 2011, I told her that this card was designed to give her the same right to government-issued identification that

is accorded to drivers. I didn't say that those rights would be limited when it came to accessing government services online.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Will Bouma: It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to showcase an event I attended with my friend and colleague the Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education, in my home riding of Brantford—Brant this past Friday. In March of this year, I remember announcing the funding for 49 new licensed child care spaces at Our Lady of Providence Catholic school in the north end of Brantford. This last Friday I was so happy to be part of the official blessing of the completed, stunning new child care centre, which includes 49 new child care spaces and three new child care rooms that will open to hard-working families on December 13.

The celebration of the blessing of this new addition to the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board was attended by Chair Rick Petrella; His Excellency Wayne Lobsinger, the auxiliary bishop of the Hamilton diocese; representatives of the YMCA, the city of Brantford and the school community. The \$1.7 million of funding that Ontario provided will provide a quality learning environment. Before, after and through-the-day child care is so vitally important to many people's lives.

Last Wednesday I was also happy to announce an additional \$4.4-million investment to the Grand Erie District School Board for a similar build of quality child care spaces in Cobblestone elementary and Banbury Heights School to help hard-working families in Brantford and Paris, for a combined 64 new child care spaces respectively.

Funding and having quality programs before school, all day and after school is a huge step in helping families achieve a work-life balance that is so important in today's complex and busy lifestyles.

1030

ROAD SAFETY

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning. On December 2, 2020, just a little less than a year ago, Alexandra Amaro was struck and killed while cycling on Dufferin Street in my riding of Davenport. Alexandra was a writer and a journalism student, known for her radiant kindness. At 23, she had a bright future in front of her, and it was brought to a very abrupt end that night.

Alexandra's death is a singular, painful event for those who knew and loved her, but it is also part of a pattern of injury and death facing cyclists and pedestrians on Toronto's busy downtown streets. And while the city has been spurred into action to address some of the infrastructure issues on this stretch of Dufferin that we've been dealing with for so many years, we know that changes on the provincial level are needed.

That's why I was so pleased to see MPPs vote unanimously last week in support of our bill, the Protecting

Vulnerable Road Users Act, at second reading. Under the bill, penalties would apply to all driving offences under the Highway Traffic Act that result in the death or serious injury of a vulnerable road user. Along with increasing funding for municipalities to improve active transportation, public transportation and infrastructure like bike lanes, I urge the government to swiftly pass the Vulnerable Road Users Act into law.

A year after Alexandra's death, we have a chance to make a difference. The sooner we, as legislators, act, the sooner we can prevent the loss of more lives like Alexandra's on our streets.

PAINT THE TOWN RED

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Many were disappointed last year when Paint the Town Red Canada Day parade, our annual tradition in Port Credit, was cancelled due to the pandemic. This year, a modified event, including a concert and fireworks, went ahead at Thanksgiving. Thank you to the chair, John Bozzo, this year's recipient of the Gordon S. Shipp Memorial Award as Mississauga's citizen of the year, and many local volunteers. Together, they did an incredible job under very difficult circumstances to make the concert a safe and moving experience for all who attended and truly a Thanksgiving to remember.

The province supported this event with a \$76,000 grant through the Reconnect Festival and Event Program. I was proud to sponsor the performance by the Hip cover band as we marked the fourth year since we lost Gord Downie and the fourth annual Brain Cancer Awareness Day in Canada. This was in honour of one of my staff who is a brain tumour survivor.

I want to thank the other sponsors, including Queenscorp, Loretta Phinney, Fram Building Group and the Lakeview Community Partners. I want to thank the organizers for their memorial tribute in honour of those we have lost during the pandemic.

Hundreds of people attended the Port Credit Memorial Park, including Mayor Hazel McCallion. I know we all look forward to celebrating Canada Day together again at the parade next year.

CLERK OF PROCEDURAL SERVICES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I would ask for the attention of the House. I have a very sad duty this morning because I have to announce that, after 32 years of working at the Legislative Assembly, Tonia Grannum, who is one of our table Clerks, will be hanging up her robes for the last time today. This is her last day in the chamber.

Tonia began her career as a research assistant in committees branch and went on to become a committee Clerk. She's been a table Clerk and the head of the committees branch, now called procedural services, for 14 years now.

I can recall travelling on standing committees with Tonia when she was a committee Clerk in the days when standing committees travelled. Yes, we had long days: committee meetings with deputants back to back from 9 to

6, then fly at night to the next city, find the hotel, deal with all the mix-ups when you got there, have dinner at 9 o'clock or 10 o'clock. And the next day it would start all over again.

No matter what came up—winter storms delaying flights, members sometimes working together, other times at each other's throats—she was always calm, cool, collected, a model of professionalism. She would solve every problem as it came up, just as all of our outstanding committee Clerks do. She's done the very same at the table. It's been a privilege to work with her in my capacity as Speaker for the last three years.

Tonia, you leave with our eternal gratitude. Congratulations on your exemplary career here, serving Ontario's Parliament. We will miss you. On behalf of all the members, thank you for your three decades-plus of commitment to making parliamentary democracy work, working together as we all serve the people of Ontario.

We wish you good health and happiness. Please join me in showing our appreciation to Tonia Grannum.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): It is now time for oral questions.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: On behalf of Ontario's New Democrats and our New Democratic caucus, I want to thank Tonia for all of her amazing support and work over the years. She truly has been a wonderful woman and a beautiful personality to work with here in the chamber and throughout all of the work that she's done. Thanks, Tonia, and good luck.

Speaker, if you'll indulge me just one more time, can I just say Oskee Wee Wee? Hamilton won their game yesterday and are looking forward to meeting up with Toronto this coming weekend.

My question, actually, is a bit more serious in terms of topics, and it's for the Premier. As we know, Ontarians are rightly alarmed and a little bit worried about what's happening with COVID-19 these days. We all have seen our cases climb up to around the 1,000 mark on a daily basis. At this point, 9,994 Ontarians have lost their lives. I haven't got the stats from today, so that might quite actually be the grim milestone of 10,000 by now. If not, it will happen this week, likely.

The Omicron variant, as people know, is extremely contagious and is in several countries around the world, including here in our country and our province. There are lots of unknowns about whether the vaccines actually work on this particular variant. My question, simply, to the Premier is: What is he doing to ensure that Ontarians are protected from this latest variant, especially as we make plans to get together with loved ones over the holidays?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the leader of the official opposition for her question. But before I answer it let me also say, on behalf of government, that we also recognize and thank Tonia very much for your years of dedicated service and your knowledge of this place, but also for your incredible personality. We can still see your smile even though you have a mask on. Thank you for your service.

In answer to the Leader of the Opposition's question, this, of course, is a concern for many of us. The best option is to stop the Omicron variant from getting across the border, so we are very pleased with the steps that the federal government has taken so far to ensure that we are testing all people who have returned or travelled from South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini, Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

We recognize that there may be others that may need to be added to the list, since the two people who have already been diagnosed were travelling from Nigeria. I would expect that other locations are going to be identified, and that's why we are continuing to ask the federal government to ensure that everyone is tested who comes into Canada, regardless of where they come from. This is one of the most important things we need to do to protect Ontarians, and I'll speak further in the supplemental.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: On the weekend, Dr. Jüni, the head of the science table, said that the Omicron virus spreads faster than the Delta virus—or the Omicron strain, rather, spreads even faster than Delta. The Premier may recall that he justified finally giving Ontario workers three paid sick days because the spread of Delta was faster than the initial coronavirus strain in Ontario. At that time, the Minister of Labour said that sick days are “to ensure that we continue to get people vaccinated as quickly as possible and protect workers sick from this virus.”

The same threat is with us today, Speaker, and it seems to be getting worse. Will the Premier be extending paid sick days beyond December 31 and making them permanent for Ontario workers?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question from the Leader of the Opposition. The opposition leader will know that we took steps immediately at the beginning of the pandemic to ensure that our workers who were impacted by COVID-19 were protected. As you know, the Premier also negotiated an over \$1-billion program of paid sick days with the federal government. We're going to continue to work with the federal government to ensure that programs to support Canadians throughout COVID continue to happen, and we'll continue to ensure that workers have access to paid sick days.

1040

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, regardless of the recasting of history, we do have an important opportunity now to do the right thing moving forward. Seventeen

schools have closed due to COVID-19; 712 schools have reported cases. Sudbury, Kingston and Algoma are responding with new restrictions. New variant Omicron is already here in Ontario, as I have already mentioned and as has been acknowledged by the Minister of Health.

So, the question is, will the Premier commit to extending paid sick days beyond December 31, and to make them permanent so that we can actually protect working people, keep them safe and reduce the spread of the Omicron virus?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure why the Leader of the Opposition has to always go to the negative. This is what the province of Ontario has accomplished in its fight against COVID-19: We have ensured that workers are safe. We have ensured that they have access to paid sick days. The Minister of Education has ensured that our students have a return-to-school protocol that is safe, including investments in air purification. We have ensured that the medical officers of health across the 34 different regions have the tools they need to fight COVID-19 in their areas. The Minister of Health has made sure that our front-line health care workers have the tools that they need. That is what has led to Ontario having one of the world-leading vaccination—almost 90% have a single dose, and approaching 90% on both doses. We're seeing tremendous uptake with kids from five to 11, Mr. Speaker.

I think Ontario has done a great job. There is more work to be done. We will continue to do the work that is necessary to lead Canada and to lead North America.

HIGHWAY TOLLS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. The Premier tweeted last week, during his blustery comments regarding Barrie condo owners, that, "A contract is a contract, and must be respected!" Meanwhile, he let the 407 off the hook for \$1 billion in penalties stemming from their contract. The company started negotiating to break their contract with the government back in March of last year and yet they still made \$148 million in profits from tolls. Looks like a contract is a contract, unless the Premier decides it's time to rip it up.

How on earth can the Premier explain a \$1-billion write-off to corporate owners of the 407—helping his buddies—while surgeries, diagnostics are still backlogged and while schools are still not safe from COVID-19?

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

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. As she knows, the COVID-19 pandemic had significant impacts on traffic levels on the 407 as well as Ontario's roads and highways. These were unprecedented circumstances, as Ontarians complied with stay-at-home orders while fighting multiple waves of COVID-19. This resulted, Mr. Speaker, in the 407 invoking the relief clause under its contract with the Ministry of Transportation. At the end of the day, this is a contractual issue.

Our government took immediate action at the beginning of the pandemic to bring relief to drivers by freezing tolls on the 407 east, on the 412 and on the 418, to deliver more relief to drivers.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition talks about standing up for drivers, but the NDP stood by while the Liberals, under Steven Del Duca, when he was Minister of Transportation, signed a contract in 2015 that locked drivers into tolls on the 412 and the 418. We're focused on providing relief for drivers, and that will continue to be our focus.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, you don't throw stones when you live in a glass house. It was the Conservatives who sold the 407 contract in the first place and privatized all of those revenues for their buddies, as opposed to for the benefit of Ontarians. So it's quite funny, actually, that response from the minister.

But look, the 407 does make hundreds of millions of dollars of revenue for their shareholders. That's because that's the way this party that's governing now wanted it to be. But they could have avoided the penalties in their contract altogether by, for example, reducing or eliminating tolls to attract more cars to the highway, which frankly would have also helped Ontarians. Instead, they asked Premier Ford for a \$1-billion break, and he gave it to them. Worse, a second \$1-billion break is on the table for 2021.

My question is, how, in the depths of this pandemic, could the Premier think a \$1-billion penalty to a private company should just be wiped away, even as they continue to make huge profits?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: As I said, at the end of the day, this is a contractual issue.

In response to COVID-19, our government took immediate action to provide relief to drivers across the province. We suspended the collection of interest on unpaid toll fees from Highways 407 east, 412 and 418. We froze the scheduled increases to driver and carrier products, like driver's licences and validation tags. We extended the validity of government driver, vehicle and carrier fees to keep people safe. And we froze the scheduled CPI increase to toll rates on Highways 407 east, 412 and 418 that was scheduled to come into effect on June 1, 2020.

Mr. Speaker, we are looking at ways to make life more affordable for Ontarians, especially drivers, as we're going through the next wave of COVID-19. We are committed to affordability. That has been our focus since the beginning of the pandemic and will continue to be our focus as we continue to navigate COVID-19.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In the laundry list, the minister forgot to mention that they gave the 407 a \$1-billion gift.

Look, they quietly made that decision back in April, behind closed doors. The public didn't have any idea of what the government was up to; they never told the public. The 407's own financial statements show that it continues to make significant profits: "The company maintains

sufficient liquidity and expects to be able to satisfy all of its obligations in 2021.”

As you may know, I've asked the Auditor General to look into this fiasco, but the Premier and his team can clear this up right now. How could the Premier write off \$1 billion of penalties, especially when apparently he believes a contract is a contract, and it must be respected?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: Well, if the Leader of the Opposition wants to talk about contracts, I wonder what she had to say back in 2015 when then-Minister of Transportation Steven Del Duca locked a contract in against drivers in Durham region to pay tolls for 30 years. Our government has never and will never sign a contract like that, Mr. Speaker, so we certainly won't take any lectures from the Leader of the Opposition on the issue.

Unlike the Del Duca Liberals and the NDP, who sat by, we're taking action to make life more affordable for Ontarians. We took immediate action to provide relief to drivers across the province, and we're continuing to look for ways to make sure that we provide affordable relief for drivers as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier. As a new threat of a new variant looms large, the Delta variant continues to spread in our schools, and cases are rapidly climbing among our youngest students. Cumulative school cases are now surpassing 7,000, and 17 schools have closed entirely. Something is not working.

I wish the Premier would just admit that allowing class sizes to balloon and waiting until mid-November to release a testing plan has put another school year in jeopardy. With the risk profile changing, will he act now to ramp up in-school protections and take-home testing before it's too late?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to remind the member opposite that the government in fact announced actions to deploy testing—the first in the country to do so—to all schools in the province of Ontario, rapid antigen tests for every child going home this holiday to ensure a safe return in January.

The government acted well before this variant entered our shores in the context of strengthening elementary school protocols, restricting lunches to cohorts, requiring virtual events within schools, really with the aim to reduce indirect and direct contact. We've extended the second term funding of \$300 million to all schools to help build upon the hiring of over 2,000 staff supporting children.

1050

We have one of the lowest case rates for kids under 19 in Canada and we have one of the highest vaccine rates. We are taking nothing for granted. It's the basis for why we announced the extension of PCR take-home tests to all families for symptomatic and asymptomatic purposes.

Some 157,000 kids have signed up to get the vaccine; that is promising. We'll continue to do whatever it takes to keep our school system safe.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, under this minister's watch, Ontario schools were closed longer than any other jurisdiction in North America, and our kids are still feeling and suffering the impact of those closures. You will excuse me and parents out there for being a little bit skeptical with a response like that from this minister.

I'm going back to the Premier: Four more schools have reported new cases over the weekend in Thunder Bay. There are nine active outbreaks in Durham region schools and at least 23 schools with outbreaks in Ottawa. In total, 712 schools in this province have cases.

The head of the science table has said, “We need to try to tread as carefully as we can” to avoid more explosive outbreaks in schools. Our kids, our families cannot afford another school closure like last year.

What action is this government going to take today to keep our kids safe and our schools safely open?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It's not lost on parents that if the NDP were in power they would have closed schools and locked down our province for the entire duration of the year. The inconsistency of the New Democrats to reopen, followed by a desire to close schools, reopen schools—that is your consistency, the fact that you are not following the best science and the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, who has said the school system has been robust and safe, which is why we have taken nothing for granted.

It's why weeks ago we announced the expansion of testing in our province, the only province in Canada to do so, with the use of rapid test kits for all children. It's why we have a PCR take-home test. It's why we expanded ventilation in every single school and strengthened the protocols within elementary school.

Mr. Speaker, five in six secondary schools have not reported an active case, and today, six in seven elementary schools do not have an active case at all. But we take nothing for granted, which is why we extended funding, we've improved ventilation, and we're working to make testing more available to more families right across Ontario.

ECONOMIC REOPENING AND RECOVERY

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Speaker, as we know, global supply chain challenges and economic uncertainty have driven prices in our province and many other jurisdictions higher. But Ontarians want to know that their government is taking swift action to ensure that economic certainty and job stability remains, now and into the future. All Ontarians deserve to know that their government is taking action to ensure that good jobs are being protected today and into the future.

Speaker, through you, what is the minister planning to do to help protect Ontarians through these challenging times and to create the right conditions for future economic growth?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the member from Niagara West for that question, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. This economic adversity couldn't come at a more challenging time. That is why we have a plan, a plan to build Ontario.

As we all know, we inherited a province from the previous government where real investment in infrastructure never materialized to the level needed. That's why, in our 2021 Ontario economic statement and fiscal review, we have a plan, a plan to support Ontarians by growing this province as the best place to do business, to work, and raise a family.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to say yes. We are going to say yes to investing in our health care capacity and investing \$30.2 billion over the next 10 years to build, expand and enhance hospitals; yes to supporting Ontario workers who have fallen behind, including supporting them through minimum wage; and yes to getting shovels in the ground on roads and bridges. That's why we've invested an additional \$2.6 billion in funding to support the Ontario highways program, which features more than 580 construction, expansion and rehabilitation projects. We are saying yes to building the foundation for our future prosperity.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the Minister of Finance for that response. I know many of my constituents are very glad to hear that this is a government that has their back.

But my constituents also want to ensure that the work that is moving Ontario forward, to build Ontario up and ensure future economic growth is maintained.

Speaker, back to the Minister of Finance: While I appreciate that answer from the minister, there is always more that can be done. Could the minister tell us what the government's plan is to take measures that will support hardest-hit Ontarians where they need it most?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you again to the member for that question. As we've said, as a government, we are focused on affordability, and we've been focused on that since day one. Our government continues to support households with the Ontario Electricity Rebate for residential customers, small businesses and farms.

We introduced the LIFT, the low-income family tax credit, for workers who had fallen behind, as well as expanded the CARE tax credit for families and caregivers. Bill 43 proposes to extend the Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit to help seniors or those living with senior relatives make renovations on their homes to make them safer and more accessible.

Speaker, these are just a handful of measures our government is taking to support Ontarians. It's all part of a plan to build Ontario's future. That means getting shovels in the ground for highways, hospitals, housing,

schools and high-speed Internet. We're making these investments to improve our health care and will continue to do so in the future.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Last week we were once again horrified by another terrible incident in private long-term care. Jacy Ruuhala had to intervene to save her father's life. Her father was very ill from a urinary tract infection and moments away from sepsis if his daughter didn't fight the centre to call 911 and have him sent to a hospital. That happened at Hawthorne Place, one of the seven private long-term care facilities that were so bad during the pandemic that the military had to be called in and later published a long list of shocking and sickening deficiencies. After this, a hospital administrator temporarily took over, and yet here we are again as though not a single lesson has been learned.

We've seen enough. It's time to pull the plug on profit in long-term care and give residents a second chance at a life where the only priority is their health and dignity, because they deserve so much better than what they're getting.

Why won't this government do the right thing and take profits out of long-term care?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: To be very clear, it is this government that has put significant resources back into the long-term care sector. We are providing a North American-leading four hours of care. We're moving to that standard. Of course, that has been talked about for a long time in the province of Ontario by both a Liberal government and the Liberal-NDP coalition, from 2011 to 2014, but never done.

This government is doing that with the resources that come with that. We're hiring over 27,000 additional PSWs. We are building over 30,000 new beds across the province of Ontario. Every community in this province will have access to a brand new, state-of-the-art long-term care facility because of the work that this government is doing.

What we won't do is what the NDP are suggesting we do: Put thousands of people out of work so that we can buy and then close down long-term care homes. That's their plan. That's certainly not our plan.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: This question will show just how similar this Conservative government is to the Liberal government before them. Last week, the NDP private member's bill the Time to Care Act was tabled again for the fifth time. This vital bill that would legally guarantee every long-term care resident in Ontario a minimum standard of four hours of direct care per day was voted for unanimously in this House. But whether it's a Conservative or a Liberal government, this bill never gets to third reading, because it appears that they don't want it to

become law, but they also don't have the gall to vote against it.

The clock is ticking. We have months before the end of this session when all bills that have not been passed into law will die. Will this government, right here, right now, commit to bringing back the Time to Care Act for third reading and vote it into law, or will they make it die once again and show us what they really think?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I truly don't know where the member has been, because this government has already passed that level of care. I just mentioned it: a North American-leading level of care, four hours of care. And to support that, we are putting billions of dollars behind that. We are hiring 27,000 new additional PSWs. We are bringing on some 30,000 new long-term-care beds in the system.

The only people that have never prioritized long-term care, in fact, are the NDP and, of course, the Liberals. The Liberals built 611 beds, Mr. Speaker. In between 2011 and 2014, this party, the NDP, held the balance of power. Was long-term care their priority? No. Was education their priority? No. Was health care their priority? No. On every single thing that matters to the people of the province of Ontario, the NDP could have put an end to the reign of terror of the Liberal Party, but they chose to support them for a stretch goal in insurance that they never really meant to happen.

1100

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. John Fraser: COVID case counts are rising, and Ontarians are very concerned about the Omicron variant and the impact it may have on their lives. Throughout this pandemic, this government has been indecisive and slow to act, and that has led to the unnecessary spread of the virus.

It took 400 days to get three temporary paid sick days, and that led to the unnecessary spread of the virus. Speaker, we know that parents are going to need these days in the new year to take their children to get their second doses, or for people to go get their boosters, or for people to stay home because they're sick.

Speaker, through you to the Premier: It's about being ready, so will the Premier do the right thing, pass Bill 7 today and provide 10 permanent paid sick days to every Ontario worker?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, when you talk about being ready, let's be very clear about what happened in the province of Ontario during this pandemic. This province was brought to its knees and had to go through longer lockdowns than any other North American jurisdiction because the previous Liberal government left us unprepared. Eight hundred people in intensive care brought this province to its knees. One of the richest provinces in Canada, if not the richest, and one of the richest jurisdictions in North America was brought to its

knees because the previous government never made the investments in long-term care, never made the investments in intensive care, never made the investments to ensure that our front-line workers had access to PPE.

On every single matter, Mr. Speaker, the previous Liberal government failed, and in the dying days of their administration they decided to bring in some sick days—not good enough. And that's why the people of the province of Ontario reduced them to five, six or seven—I'm not sure what it is, Mr. Speaker. But the people of the province of Ontario know that they can rely on this government to get the job done once and for all.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, to the minister: 400 days. And making 10 paid sick days permanent is only part of what this government needs to do.

We know what needs to happen: Make vaccinations mandatory for front-line health care workers and education workers. Ensure an effective vaccine rollout for five- to 11-year-olds and make vaccinations universal in schools. Expand third-dose booster eligibility. Improve ventilation in indoor public settings, like schools. Continue vaccine certificates. Expand access to rapid testing. Stop the harassment of our front-line health care workers and families.

Speaker, will the Premier do the right thing and address these gaps, or is he still planning to end vaccine certificates and the pandemic on January 17?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Our government is taking the necessary steps. As of today, we have 89.9% of the population 12 and up having received their first dose, 87% having received two doses. We have appointments for five- to 11-year-olds booked: 157,900. We've also had 69,000 children aged 5 to 11 vaccinated within the last week, which is 6.4% of that population group, and obviously the appointments are being booked.

We're encouraging everyone, especially with the Omicron variant now in the province of Ontario, to please get vaccinated. And we're making sure that we are going to expand the number of people who can go for the booster doses in different age groups. We'll have more to say about that in the next week.

We are taking every step possible that we can take to protect the people of Ontario.

NORTHERN ECONOMY

Mr. Norman Miller: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry. Last week I saw there was a news conference with that minister, the Minister of Energy and the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade about investing in a new electric arc furnace in the Algoma Steel facility in Sault Ste. Marie. After years of the north being ignored by the previous government, it's great to see our government investing in northern Ontario.

Speaker, through you, can the minister please tell this House what this investment in Algoma Steel means for Ontarians?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply on behalf of the government, the member for Peterborough–Kawartha and parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Dave Smith: It is always a good day to rise in this House and talk about the great work we're doing in northern Ontario. Last week, the aforementioned ministers were in Sault Ste. Marie to announce funding to help build a new electric arc furnace for Algoma Steel, something that wasn't possible under the energy policies of the previous Liberals.

Algoma Steel provides good-paying jobs and materials needed to build cars, technology, transit, hospitals, schools and community infrastructure that are at the heart of Ontario's economic recovery.

Investing in jobs in the north has been a priority for this government since day one, and we'll continue to fight for good-paying jobs and keep them right here in this province. Compare this to the Ontario Liberal Party, who were supported by the NDP: They said no to jobs like the ones at Algoma Steel and, as a result, waved goodbye to 300,000 manufacturing jobs during their time in government.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant for that impassioned answer. It's great to see that this government is standing up for Ontario jobs and making sure this province remains competitive while we recover from the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We all know that jobs are a priority for this government and ensuring that we keep jobs intact as we transition to a greener technology is paramount. We know that we can support jobs while being environmentally friendly, but the approach has to be balanced. Speaker, back to the minister: What does this announcement mean for the environment?

Mr. Dave Smith: The upgrades being made at Algoma Steel will leverage Ontario's clean energy advantage: 94% clean. It will provide them with an affordable and reliable supply of clean electricity for years to come. Clean, made-in-Ontario steel is a central part of Ontario's plan to build, leveraging domestic production of cars, technology, transit, hospitals, schools and community infrastructure, and that's at the heart of Ontario's economic recovery.

Our government continues to take action to support job creation and investment certainty in an environmentally conscious way for industries across North America, just like we did last week for Algoma Steel. We will continue to make strategic investments into jobs in northern Ontario because that supports all of this province.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is for the Premier. This weekend, parents and children in North Bay were met

by a crowd of angry, megaphone-wielding anti-vax protesters who screamed and cursed at them as they tried to take their kids to get their vaccine.

Abby Blaszyk took her seven-year-old boy to get his life-saving shot and was screamed at through a megaphone, called a murderer and told that getting her boy vaccinated is genocide. Think about it. This is absolutely unacceptable, Speaker. Families like Abby's are already stressed enough, and this is only making things worse.

We asked you before children's vaccinations started to pass the NDP's safety zones legislation to spare families from harassment. Will the government pass this bill by the leader of the NDP today, or will they keep emboldening anti-vaxxers?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think the member knows, as we've talked about, that there are already in place significant protections to ensure that people are safe. The police do have the resources to ensure that.

The member is quite correct, though, in his assertion that this is completely unacceptable. I think we would all agree—or at least most of us in this chamber—with the member and with the obvious anger the member has expressed in his question. It is very, very clear—it should be very clear to everybody that getting a vaccination is not only safe, it is the right way to get us through this pandemic. If you love your family, if you love freedom, then you should get yourself a shot so that we can all get back to normal.

That is the best way for us to get out of this pandemic. And if you're one of those people who thinks that it is somehow smart or intelligent to go out there and protest families doing so, give your head a shake and think about it.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again to the Premier: Protests like this are exactly why the safety zones legislation we proposed can't wait. This should have been done months ago, but the Ford government would rather pander to the anti-vax vote.

1110

Children like Abby's son need this vaccine to stay healthy and keep going to school. And while Abby is relieved her son got the shot, she is worried that he has been traumatized by walking down an alley of hate and misinformation while adults yelled at him through a megaphone.

Premier, every day that you delay these important protections is another day parents and kids are potentially at risk of the sorts of protests that hurt Abby and her son in North Bay this weekend. Speaker, again, through you to the Premier: Will you work with us to pass our safety zone legislation and finally commit to keeping our schools and hospitals safe?

Hon. Paul Calandra: As noted earlier, there are tools already in place for our law enforcement officials to ensure that people are safe. With respect to pandering, I suspect

that there are at least a number of our colleagues who would feel differently than the member opposite.

We have believed right from the beginning that the best way to get beyond this pandemic is to ensure that people get vaccinated. That is why close to 90% of Ontarians have two doses. That is why we are seeing five-to-11s really book at an amazing rate.

Are there individuals out there who ought to know better? Absolutely. Are we all angry and frustrated that there are some individuals—a very small minority of individuals—who are doing this to parents? Absolutely. But as I said, we are as angry as the member opposite is, but ultimately there are tools in place for law enforcement to ensure that all people are safe. Again, Mr. Speaker, the best way for us to get beyond this is to get vaccinated.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Roman Baber: To the Minister of Health: For a year and a half this Premier and this government continue draconian measures against Ontarians, with lockdowns and mandates. The Premier talks a good game: No one wants to see businesses open more than him. No one loves nurses more than him. He is against passports because it will create a two-tier society.

A month ago the Premier said that vaccine passports would be lifted on January 17. But on November 24 the head of the science table said that the probability that we drop passports in mid-January is next to zero. Who should Ontarians believe: the Premier, who says vaccine passports will end mid-January, or the head of the science table, who says they won't?

Hon. Christine Elliott: We should believe the Chief Medical Officer of Health, who is the chief person who is advising the government and who is looking at the clinical evidence, who is looking at the trends, who is looking at the number of case counts in Ontario and who has said from the beginning, when the plan came forward, that this is what we are expecting to do; however, if plans change, if there is a sudden increase, if there is a variant that comes in that causes concern, then we will have to change the plan.

But the people need to know what is coming forward. That is what we expect will come forward, subject always to the caveat that the situation might change. We are doing everything in our power to ensure that the people of Ontario remain safe and healthy.

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

Mr. Roman Baber: The reports of aerosol transmission were available as early as spring 2020. We heard that the virus was transmitting through ventilation in New York restaurants as early as summer 2020. In July 2020, the New York Times wrote, "Yes, the Coronavirus Is in the Air." Also in July 2020, the WHO said that the virus can be airborne indoors. But for two years, Canadian health authorities denied the science by suggesting that transmission was by droplet. You see, despite discussing ventilation, this government and public health authorities

recommended Plexiglas everywhere. Businesses spent thousands of dollars while some school boards put students behind a glass box.

Four days ago the head of the science table told Global News that Plexiglas may do more harm than good because it prevents ventilation. Does the minister understand that there is no universe in which both Plexiglas and ventilation make sense? And will she listen to the head of the science table and instruct all places and businesses to remove Plexiglas immediately?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Our government has always followed the advice and recommendations of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, who is also advised by the science table, by Public Health Ontario and by others. They are epidemiologists. They understand the transmission of this virus.

We understand that we need to continue to follow all of the health and safety precautions that we've always followed: wearing a mask indoors or when we're in close contact with people, physical distancing, washing hands. All of those measures will remain in place to keep all of us safe and healthy so that we can then move on with reopening Ontario.

But we're not there yet. We need to continue to get more people vaccinated. That is going to be the most important thing we can do. Ventilation, of course, is also always important, but the most important thing right now is for more people to get vaccinated. We're asking anyone who has not been vaccinated yet to please do so right away.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Good morning. Ontario is proud to be home to the largest Jewish community in Canada. Now that the celebration of Hanukkah has begun, this is an excellent time to recognize the tremendous contributions the Jewish community continues to make to Ontario. While this is a time of celebration, sadly, we have also borne witness to a disturbing rise in anti-Semitic hate and hate crimes in our province. This is a solemn reminder that our work to combat anti-Semitism is not done.

Can the Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism please inform the House about the actions our government is taking to eliminate racism and hate from Ontario?

Hon. Parm Gill: I want to thank the member from Mississauga Centre for that important question. This also allows me the opportunity to wish the Jewish community a very happy Hanukkah. Ontario is of course proud to be home to the largest Jewish community here in the country.

Our government is honoured to stand shoulder to shoulder with our Jewish community and to continue to take strong action, determined to fight anti-Semitism. Our government has absolutely zero tolerance when it comes to any form of racism and hate, including anti-Semitism. That is why we're working with our partners like La'ad Canada and other community organizations across our great province as we work together to build a stronger, prosperous and inclusive Ontario.

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

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Thank you to the minister for his answer. I also wanted to thank him for recently visiting Mississauga and celebrating Polish Independence Day with our community.

Speaker, through you: I know the Jewish community in my riding will be pleased to know about the work our government is doing in collaboration with our community partners to rid Ontario of anti-Semitism and hate of all forms. This has never been more important than now. I am proud to stand on this side of the House and support Jewish communities right across our beautiful province.

Now that the Festival of Lights has begun and the menorahs are being lit, can the minister please tell this House what our government is doing to shine a light on racism and hate, wherever it may be hiding?

Hon. Parm Gill: I want to thank the member for that question again. On this side of the House, our government is absolutely committed to doing everything in its power and making the necessary investments that are needed. That's why in our recent fall economic statement we announced \$8.1 million in additional funding to fight—anti-racism and anti-hate—and introduced initiatives like doubling the Anti-Racism and Anti-Hate Grant from \$1.6 million to \$3.2 million. The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs had to say this, Mr. Speaker: “We applaud the government of Ontario” for “doubling of funding for the Anti-Racism and Anti-Hate Grant program,” saying, “This program is a critical step forward in addressing the rise in anti-Semitism.”

Our government will always defend the right of every person to practise their faith and live their lives free of intimidation and hate. I look forward to taking part in celebrations over the holidays. And I want to wish everyone Happy Hanukkah once again.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Suze Morrison: My question is for the Premier. Families and especially women across Ontario cannot find or afford the child care that they need to return to work. Even Jason Kenney's Conservatives in Alberta are now working with the federal government to create affordable child care spaces, while Ontario families wait for this Premier to make a deal.

I recently heard from Leah, a constituent of mine in Toronto Centre. Leah and her wife are delaying their plans to have a second child because they simply cannot afford to have two children in child care at the same time. Leah told me, “It doesn't make any sense, why wouldn't you want to decrease barriers for mostly mothers getting back into the workforce?”

Premier, when can families like Leah's finally expect your government to deliver on a deal for \$10-a-day child care in Ontario?

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

1120

Hon. Stephen Lecce: You can certainly count on our government to stand up for Ontario's interests and children who want a fair deal from the federal government. We have met with the federal government twice now, with the aim of landing a deal, one that delivers on \$10-a-day child care, which is what the federal government has committed to for the people of this province. Obviously, we're ensuring that we get the requisite investment to achieve \$10-a-day, not \$20- or \$30- or \$40-a-day, which I think all of us would agree is not what the feds committed to.

We're working with them constructively to do that. We're making the case for more sustainability and more flexibility to support moms and dads across Ontario who need this support. We know child care is too expensive. The former Liberal government had a disastrous record of increasing child care costs by 400% over their tenure, 40% above the national average. Obviously, that's unacceptable. Our Premier is committed to reducing cost and increasing access, which is why we're at the table making the case for a fair deal at the lowest cost for all families in this province.

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

Ms. Suze Morrison: Back to the Premier: Leah's family doesn't want to wait for this government to negotiate a deal that favours private, big-box child care, where taxpayer-subsidized profits go to shareholders. When I asked Leah about this, she said, “I don't think my child's care should be profited off of. It creates shady motivations with worse child care worker ratios.”

Families like Leah's are being clear with this government: They expect you to deliver a deal for affordable, high-quality, publicly funded, not-for-profit child care in Ontario. When will this government stop shirking your responsibilities to Ontario families, invest in affordable child care and sign a deal that gets \$10-a-day child care for families in Ontario?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Unlike the New Democrats and Liberals, who believe they know best for how parents raise their children—24% of operators in this province are independently managed. They do a good job and they support access for families across Ontario. I would never denigrate hard-working child care operators in the province of Ontario, as the NDP just did.

What I will say is that every single family deserves support from this federal government. We know that they currently contribute roughly 2.5% of Ontario's allocation for child care. They've got to do much more, which is why we're at the table to make the case for a fair deal that gets prices down to \$10 for families.

When you reflect on the legacy of the former Liberals, of the Del Duca Liberals, where child care rose by 400%—obviously every government, provincially, federally and municipally, has to work together to get these prices down, which is precisely what we're doing, by meeting with them, presenting our data and making the case for more flexibility and more investment to deliver on an imperative

of this government, which is affordability and increased access for all parents in this province.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: On behalf of our members, I just want to say thank you to Tonia Grannum. Thank you for all the work you've done over the years. Thank you for training me when I was a new MPP on committee.

Speaker, my question is for the Premier or Minister of Education. The holiday season can be a warm and happy time of year. It can also be a time of anxiety and worry, as we all know. This year, once again, we're all living with a degree of apprehension as COVID continues to be a threatening, morphing reality.

I can remember as a young mom, in the lead-up to Christmas, juggling all the needs and expectations of my three kids, balancing my work in and outside of the home, and that feeling of exhaustion. But my worries were not about whether my kids would be fed or whether they would have gifts under the tree; my worries were not about who was going to look after them when I was at work.

But those are exactly the worries of thousands of families across this province. Year in and year out, mothers in particular struggle to make arrangements for their children. When it's holiday time, those struggles are amplified. The gaps seem wider and more insurmountable. In the middle of the night, the fear of not being able to look after your kids adequately can be a really dark pit.

Speaker, I know that the answer from the minister will include a spin on what our government did or did not do while in office. But here's the thing: Never for one moment in our time in office did we have a federal government putting \$30 billion on the table to reduce child care costs in Ontario. Why has this government not yet signed a child care deal with the federal government?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It is just a matter of fact that under the tenure of the Del Duca Liberals, child care rose by 400%. That is indefensible, and I think everyone in this Legislature would recognize that families paid the price for that neglect, where it was inaccessible and unaffordable for too many moms and dads in Ontario. That is their legacy, one which the people of Ontario rejected in the last election, which is why our government, in the first budget, introduced a tax credit for families to help them save money, roughly \$1,500 a year.

We know there's more to do, which is why we enhanced it during the pandemic. It's why we continue to sit with the federal government to make the case to get that deal, which I think all families want, so long as it is equitable, it is sustainable, and it gets us to \$10 a day. That's exactly the case we're making to the federal government.

I am proud that the Premier is standing up for the people of this province.

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

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I could spend a lot of time in this House railing against the inaccuracies

that come from that side of the house about what our government did or didn't do, but that's not my job. I know that's not my job. My job is to advocate for the people I represent and for the people of Ontario.

It was encouraging last week when we learned the minister was going to be meeting with federal officials to hammer out a child care agreement, but that has not happened. I know first-hand that negotiations between provincial and federal governments can be slow and they can be frustrating. But, Speaker, this federal government has been able to sign agreements with most of the over provinces and territories in the country. I know Ontario is special, it's very special, but families in Windsor or Thunder Bay are not so very different from families in Calgary or Halifax. They all need child care that they can afford.

Is the government serious about signing an agreement? And when can we expect to hear that families in Ontario will share from the benefits of the \$30-billion federal commitment?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, we absolutely are looking forward to landing a fair deal for the people of Ontario. It's why, for the past week, we've been negotiating in good faith to achieve that objective.

But I will say, Speaker: I think it is unacceptable that when you had, over a decade, the privilege to serve the people of Ontario—it's not that child care just remains static—

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's the federal government that's putting that money on the table, not you.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Don Valley West will come to order.

Minister of Education to reply.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It's not that the member opposite—that child care remains static. It's that it actually got 400% worse under your tenure. That is your legacy: families that weren't able to access child care in communities small and large, and the most expensive child care in Canada. That is your legacy.

Mr. John Fraser: You just can't get it done.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South, come to order.

Interjections.

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It is absolutely shameful. This Premier is absolutely committed to getting a deal that reduces cost and increases access. I was proud to stand with—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Members, take a seat.

I realize that members have strong opinions about this issue, but we still have to have a civil debate.

I'm going to ask the Minister of Education to resume his answer. Please start the clock.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Speaker, the Minister of Infrastructure and I, just last week, announced an additional

3,000 affordable child care spaces in schools. We have a plan to build 30,000 over five years.

Last year alone, 16,000 spaces were created and 19,000 the year prior. We know there is much more work to do after the disastrous legacy of the former Liberal government. We're going to work hard to get a fair deal for the families we serve in this province.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Speaker, my question is to the Minister of the Environment. Last week, the Auditor General released a scathing report on this government's failed environmental performance.

The Auditor General also reported, "When the environment ministry first identified concerns about pollution from a spill in Hamilton's Chedoke Creek in July 2018, neither the environment ministry nor the city of Hamilton informed the public about its magnitude (24 billion litres of sewage spilled over four years)."

Two years ago, I rose in this House to ask why the ministry chose to leave Hamilton in the dark. The answer from this government? It wasn't the ministry's role.

Now the Auditor General is stating the obvious: Of course the Ministry of the Environment has a role in ensuring the public is aware of spills in their community.

Speaker, my question: Will the minister apologize to the people of Hamilton for keeping this spill in the dark?

Hon. David Piccini: I appreciate the opportunity to rise to answer a question, the first question, I would add, the critic in the NDP has posed on the environment. I'm very glad to rise to answer that question.

Speaker, we understand, obviously, the impact that spills have across the province of Ontario. That's why, as a government, we've taken decisive action. The new Environmental Compliance Hub Ontario is embracing modern technology to respond better to spills as we take decisive action across the province of Ontario. I think of recent funding initiatives that I have been a part of across the region, and that member's region, to support in better responding to spills.

I'll also add that budget 2020 improved waste water management and committed funds to support municipalities to better handle spills. I know that the municipality of Hamilton, where that member hails from, has had challenges, without question, and we're working closely with that municipality to improve their waste water management. I'll have more to say in the supplementary.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It's unfortunate that the minister chooses not to apologize to the people of Hamilton for keeping them in the dark.

But it's not just the people of Hamilton who are suffering under this government's abysmal track record on the environment. In the same damning report, the Auditor General writes, "The environment ministry is not recovering its costs from responding to spills, resulting in taxpayers and not the spillers paying for" spills. The

auditor estimates that hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars have been spent cleaning up the messes polluters made.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister please stop denying and deflecting his responsibility, and work with the opposition and work with community groups to keep Ontarians and their environment safe?

Hon. David Piccini: Again, I appreciate the opportunity to rise to answer this question. We value the input from the Auditor General and value her recommendations. That's why, after a decade of inaction, a decade under which we saw a disastrous ability for Ontarians to work with their government to respond to spills—we know over 93,000 spills are reported to the ministry each year, and all get responded to by dedicated staff. Each one varies in nature. Some are more serious than others. But it's dedicated scientists, it's dedicated leaders on the ground who are responding to this, and we're working closely—but we're not stopping there. Municipal sewage systems consist of treatment plants and collection systems that are designed to convey and treat sanitary or combined sewage. We invested over \$20 million in the budget to address that.

Interjection.

Hon. David Piccini: Perhaps that member would stop heckling and listen, and she might learn something—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas must come to order.

The next question.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Roman Baber: To the Minister of Health: Last week, I asked the minister about the lives lost as a result of the government's pandemic response. For the first time, last Monday, the Minister of Health admitted that lives were lost not just from COVID but as a consequence of the government's pandemic response.

To be clear, lockdowns, increases in overdoses, a mental health catastrophe, delayed cancer diagnoses and surgeries postponed by this government also cost lives. Does the minister accept responsibility for those lives, and can she tell the Legislature how many lives were lost as a result of her actions, directly or indirectly?

Hon. Christine Elliott: What I can tell the member is that our goal from the very beginning of this pandemic is to protect the health and well-being of all Ontarians. Every action we have taken has been to do just that. Vaccination was the most important thing. But in the beginning, we didn't have vaccinations. We had to care for people in our hospitals, care for people with COVID, care for people with other issues. We had to delay some of the surgeries because our hospitals were full. So every step we have taken since then, including with the vaccinations, has been to protect and save lives.

We've got close to 90% of the population aged 12 and over vaccinated with the first dose and 87% with the second dose. We're working with children aged five to 11. We're going to be accelerating the age limits for the booster dose as we're dealing with the original Delta

variant. We have got Omicron. We're trying to contain that right now to make sure it doesn't spread, with the goal of saving as many people as possible in the province of Ontario. That is our responsibility, and that's exactly what we're doing.

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

Mr. Roman Baber: Back to the minister: We all want to save lives. That's precisely the subject of my question. Lives were lost as a result of this government's pandemic response. It's a welcome but overdue admission.

The increase in overdoses, late cancer diagnoses, late surgeries and one of the harshest and longest lockdowns in the world resulted in the death of countless Ontarians. The human toll of the government's response is the responsibility of this government. Ontarians should know how many people died as a result of the actions of this minister. But apparently there are no studies, no estimates, no thinking that actually went into assessing whether the response was deadlier than the pandemic itself.

Public Health Ontario told us that the increase in overdoses among people under 50 is three times greater than all people who died from COVID. Excess mortality, according to Statistics Canada, is three to one.

How does the minister justify imposing deadly lockdowns without measuring or estimating how many lives may be saved and how many lives may be lost as a result of the catastrophe she and the Premier perpetuated against the province of Ontario?

Hon. Christine Elliott: To the member opposite: Every step our government has taken to deal with this pandemic has weighed the pros and cons of what the effect on the general population is going to be. But we know for a fact that vaccination is the most important thing that we do right now, and we have a very successful vaccination rate in the province of Ontario and one of the lowest case rates in the world right now.

So we are taking steps. We are moving forward. We are making sure that we don't leave anybody behind, though. Because we know that we have had to postpone some surgeries, we've put over half a billion dollars into catching up with those surgeries, into making sure that our operating rooms can operate as many hours as possible, to make sure they can operate on weekends and into the evening.

We've also invested \$3.8 billion into our mental health and addictions system with the Roadmap to Wellness. We know that we need to put more resources there, because we know that many people, because of COVID-19, because of job losses and for a lot of other reasons, are experiencing significant mental health and addiction issues. That is what we have been turning our attention to, even as we're trying to manage the vaccination rate, to make sure that no Ontarian gets left behind.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, families in London West are still waiting

desperately for autism services for their kids. Virginia is a mom to two children with autism. One of her sons was among the 600 children selected for the OAP core clinical services pilot, but she's not allowed to use the funding that was deposited into her account for the life skills supports her son requires. Meanwhile, her other son, who urgently needs clinical services, is one of almost 50,000 Ontario children forced to wait for needs-based funding. When will this government stop ignoring the needs of children with autism and start providing them with the actual services they urgently require?

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

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for the question, to the member opposite. This has been an endeavour that our government has been committed to since the beginning of our mandate, to address a long-standing neglect of children with autism and their families. This is exactly why we doubled the funding, from \$300 million to \$600 million. It's why we're implementing a world-leading program that has been created by the autism community for the autism community.

This is a program that is comprehensive. It is needs-based. It is family- and child-centred. We've incorporated behavioural therapy, including ABA. We've also included mental health and speech-language pathology. This is a needs-based program that uses nine domains of need to understand how we best serve the needs of children. This is something that is going to serve tens of thousands of children. We are making sure this is rolling out. We are on target and we are getting the feedback from the 600 children who are now enrolled. Thank you for your question.

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

DEFERRED VOTES

RENT STABILIZATION ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021

SUR LA STABILISATION DES LOYERS

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

Bill 23, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 to implement various measures to stabilize rent /
Projet de loi 23, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la location à usage d'habitation afin de mettre en oeuvre diverses mesures destinées à stabiliser les loyers.

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

The division bells rang from 1139 to 1209.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 23, An Act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006 to implement various measures to stabilize rent, has taken place.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 26; the nays are 49.

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

Second reading negatived.

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

The House recessed from 1211 to 1300.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Aris Babikian: I beg leave to present the second report, 2021, of the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Aris Babikian: Just a short, brief statement to thank the committee members and the staff for their co-operation, patience, hard work and diligence. Thank you very much.

Report presented.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on General Government and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 13, An Act to amend various Acts / Projet de loi 13, Loi modifiant diverses lois.

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

Report adopted.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

1664503 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2021

Mr. Coe moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr53, An Act to revive 1664503 Ontario Inc.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

PETITIONS

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Ms. Marit Stiles: It's really a pleasure today to rise on behalf of families from Rawlinson, Fairbank Memorial, Dovercourt and The Grove school in my riding who have presented me with these petitions. It reads as follows:

"Fund Our Most Vulnerable Students, Fund Dedicated Remote Teachers for Students in ISP Programs in the TDSB.

"Hybrid learning forces teachers to divide their attention between students in-person and online, which will result in students not getting the attention they need and deserve;

"Intensive support programs at the TDSB are meant to provide additional supports for students with special behavioural, communication, physical and intellectual needs;

"Educators and experts have repeatedly pointed out that there is no evidence to support hybrid learning as an effective pedagogical tool, especially when offered to students with special needs;

"Students, parents and caregivers can and should expect a safe and supportive educational environment that safeguards their privacy from video cameras that could capture their likeness or behaviour;

"Students enrolled in intensive support programs at the TDSB are being forced to rely on hybrid learning to receive teaching instruction from their classroom teacher, thus leaving vulnerable young students without the supports that they need;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Toronto District School Board and the Ministry of Education to commit to funding and providing a dedicated remote teacher to all students enrolled in the intensive support program to supplement their in-person programming."

I support this petition, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to sign my name to it and pass it along to legislative page Ellie to table with the Clerks.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I'm presenting this petition on behalf of northern autism families.

"Support Ontario Families with Autism.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

I agree with this petition. I will sign it, and send it with page Claire to the table.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mr. Chris Glover: I read this petition on behalf of the Elementary Teachers of Toronto, the Ontario Autism Coalition, the Downtown Alternative School, and the members of the special education and disability advocacy group that I’ve hosted for the last 10 years. The petition reads, “Fund Our Most Vulnerable Students, Fund Dedicated Remote Teachers for Students in ISP Programs in the TDSB.

“Hybrid learning forces teachers to divide their attention between students in-person and online, which will result in students not getting the attention they need and deserve;

“Intensive support programs at the TDSB are meant to provide additional supports for students with special behavioural, communication, physical and intellectual needs;

“Educators and experts have repeatedly pointed out that there is no evidence to support hybrid learning as an effective pedagogical tool, especially when offered to students with special needs;

“Students, parents and caregivers can and should expect a safe and supportive educational environment that safeguards their privacy from video cameras that could capture their likeness or behaviour;

“Students enrolled in intensive support programs at the TDSB are being forced to rely on hybrid learning to receive teaching instruction from their classroom teacher, thus leaving vulnerable young students without the supports that they need;

“We, the undersigned, petition” the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, “the Toronto District School Board and the Ministry of Education to commit to funding and providing a dedicated remote teacher to all students enrolled in the intensive support program to supplement their in-person programing.”

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

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I’m going to be reading out a petition that’s been circulated by the elementary teachers of Ontario as well as the Ontario Autism Coalition and many others. It’s entitled “Fund Our Most Vulnerable

Students, Fund Dedicated Remote Teachers for Students in ISP Programs in the TDSB.

“Hybrid learning forces teachers to divide their attention between students in-person and online, which will result in students not getting the attention they need and deserve;

“Intensive support programs at the TDSB are meant to provide additional supports for students with special behavioural, communication, physical and intellectual needs;

“Educators and experts have repeatedly pointed out that there is no evidence to support hybrid learning as an effective pedagogical tool, especially when offered to students with special needs;

“Students, parents and caregivers can and should expect a safe and supportive educational environment that safeguards their privacy from video cameras that could capture their likeness or behaviour;

“Students enrolled in intensive support programs at the TDSB are being forced to rely on hybrid learning to receive teaching instruction from their classroom teacher, thus leaving vulnerable young students without the supports that they need;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Toronto District School Board and the Ministry of Education to commit to funding and providing a dedicated remote teacher to all students enrolled in the intensive support program to supplement their in-person programing.”

I certainly support this petition, will be affixing my signature to it, and giving it to page Alfie.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Marit Stiles: It’s a pleasure to present this petition on behalf of my many constituents, including Danielle Beaton. It reads as follows:

“Demand \$10-Per-Day Child Care.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario has some of the highest child care costs in the country and the costs have made quality care hard to access for many families;

“Whereas several provinces and territories, including Alberta, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Yukon, PEI and Newfoundland and Labrador have implemented a \$10-per-day child care program;

“Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on the child care sector;

1310

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

“To immediately negotiate an agreement with the federal government to introduce a \$10-per-day child care plan in the province of Ontario, improve wages for ECEs and child care professionals, and invest in child care capacity to support the recovery from COVID-19.”

I could not be happier to support this petition and affix my signature, and I’ll pass it along to page Nathaniel to table with the Clerks.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Mr. Chris Glover: This petition is entitled “Take Action on Islamophobia: Support Our London Family Act.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas on June 6, 2021, three generations of the Afzaal family were killed in an Islamophobic terror attack in London, Ontario;

“Whereas hate crimes and anti-Muslim hate crimes are on the rise, and words are not enough;

“Whereas no one should be scared to go for a walk while wearing a hijab, and no one should fear worshipping at a masjid;

“Whereas Ontario should be a province in which people can live without fear, regardless of the religion they practise, their clothes or the colour of their skin;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the Our London Family Act ... and to follow the calls to action directed at provincial governments in the NCCM’s recommendations to the National Summit on Islamophobia, including:

“—creating a provincial hate crimes accountability unit;

“—dismantling white supremacist groups by preventing them from registering as societies, and preventing acts of intimidation;

“—restoring the provincial Anti-Racism Directorate; and

“—giving Ontario schools new tools to help young people understand Islamophobia.”

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

ADDICTION SERVICES

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I’m sad to present this petition, “Prevent Overdoses in the North.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario ...

“Whereas northern Ontario has some of the highest rates of opioid-related deaths in the province and this number continues to grow; and

“Whereas we need urgent action from the provincial government to save lives in” northern Ontario;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to declare the opioid overdose crisis in northern Ontario a public health emergency, and commit funding for comprehensive, evidence-based local health and community initiatives such as harm reduction strategies, awareness programs, anti-stigma training, residential treatment, and overdose prevention services.”

I will sign this petition and send it to the table with Rishi.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Ms. Marit Stiles: I’m very pleased to present this petition on behalf of my constituent Juli Mori. It reads as follows:

“Pass Teddy’s Law to Ban Declawing in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the practice of declawing, also known as partial digital amputation, is painful and debilitating for cats; and

“Whereas the procedure can cause lasting discomfort, complications and behavioural issues in cats; and

“Whereas there are many more effective, safe, non-surgical alternatives to declawing to protect furniture and people from being scratched by cats;

“Whereas the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association and the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association have said that non-therapeutic partial digital amputation,” or declawing, “is ethically unacceptable;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 53, Teddy’s Law, to ban the declawing of cats in Ontario.”

Mr. Speaker, I couldn’t be happier to endorse this petition, affix my signature and pass it to page Isabella to table with the Clerks.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Chris Glover: This petition is entitled “Universal Child Care.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the child care fees in Ontario are unaffordable for many families;

“Whereas Ontario faces a shortage of early childhood educators and child care workers because of low wages and difficult working conditions;

“Whereas Ontario has a shortage of child care spaces;

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

“Sign and commit to the federal child care plan and follow the Roadmap to Universal Child Care in Ontario developed by the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care in collaboration with the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature and pass it to page Ellie to take to the table.

NURSES

Mr. Michael Mantha: I’m honoured to present these 701 signatures from the good people of Southlake hospital in Newmarket, Aurora, who have entitled this “Petition to Stop Unsafe Patient Care and the Erosion of Quality Critical Care at Southlake Regional Health Centre in Newmarket.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas patients requiring critical care have complex and urgent care needs and their conditions are unstable, unpredictable, and can quickly change and deteriorate; and

“Whereas these patients need registered nurses with specialized education and training who are highly skilled and experienced, and anything less puts patient safety at risk; and

“Whereas Southlake’s response to the RN staffing crisis in its intensive care unit is to hire RNs without providing full education and training in critical care nursing prior to these nurses working in the ICU; and

“Whereas existing expert RNs will be required to intervene to provide care to multiple patients when the appropriate level of care in an ICU is a 1-to-1 nurse-to-patient ratio; and

“Whereas while ICU RNs are exhausted from providing life-saving care during the COVID-19 pandemic, Southlake’s plan puts patient and staff safety at risk and is driving away the expert and experienced ICU RNs this hospital can’t afford to lose; and

“Whereas cutting skilled care means patients can suffer from unnecessary complications or death because of unassessed care needs, delayed care, missed care, miscommunication, or errors which erode safe quality patient care;

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

“Stop the pre-sponsorship program in the ICU at Southlake Regional Health Centre—a program that does not provide newly hired RNs with full education and training in critical care nursing prior to working in the ICU;

“Immediately transfer any RNs who were hired into the pre-sponsorship program enrolment into the sponsorship program—a comprehensive critical care education and training course, the successful completion of which is required prior to working in critical care at Southlake;

“Cease the plan to implement ‘team nursing’ in the ICU at Southlake—a model that does not provide the appropriate level of care for critically ill patients, which is a 1-to-1 nurse-to-patient ratio;

“Cease any subsequent plans to implement a team-based nursing model of care in the cardiac intensive care unit and the cardiovascular intensive care unit at Southlake;

“Create increased opportunities for funded full education and training of new critical care RNs at Southlake;

“Commit to fund initiatives that retain existing specialized, highly skilled, educated, and experienced critical care RNs at Southlake;

“Ensure this hospital recruits appropriately educated and trained critical care RNs to provide safe, quality care to patients who need life-saving care.”

I agree with this petition. I’ll affix my name and present it to page Hayden to bring down to the Clerks’ table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WORKING FOR WORKERS ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 VISANT À OEUVRER POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 25, 2021, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 27, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Projet de loi 27, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l’emploi, le travail et d’autres questions.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Good afternoon to all the members of the Legislature here. I’m happy to speak on Bill 27. It’s an honour to rise here to talk about Bill 27, which was introduced by the Minister of Labour.

Speaker, this bill is proposing to introduce several changes that would strengthen Ontario’s leading position in protecting workers’ rights while creating new opportunities. Our province’s economy is on course to emerge stronger than ever, and our government is helping to accelerate this fiscal growth.

1320

As we look towards the future, society is evolving. Technology use is widespread and continues to grow. More companies are emerging in this sector. What is evident is that the world of work is changing. And as a result, our government is ensuring that as this occurs, workers are protected. No one will be left behind.

Our government’s goal is to lift everyone up. Ontario’s competitiveness depends on a high-quality and talented workforce. The proposed measures within the legislation would deliver larger paycheques, greater protections and more options for workers.

Speaker, on the one hand, we know that technology offers efficiency. Communication is delivered almost instantaneously. Information is also readily available. However, technology makes it harder for people to disconnect from their jobs once they leave the desk. Too often, people are conducting work on their commutes home, or when they’re home—it’s during the little time they have with their family before returning emails. We need to stay ahead of this, implementing a clear divide between work and home.

This legislation, if passed, will include a mandate for a disconnect-from-work policy. Constant engagement in work harms not only the mental health of workers but also their families. Juggling between the demands of work and home after official work hours puts stress on individuals and others. Separation is needed between a person’s work and their home. A recent public opinion poll found that 95% of people would support the right to disconnect from workplace devices. This proposed change has overwhelming support, and it makes sense.

There are other jurisdictions that have implemented similar policies. European countries such as France and Spain have implemented national disconnect-from-work policies. Looking at France, policy-makers consider off-duty email use as a health and safety concern. They implemented a policy to address rising stress levels among employees who check email after hours.

North America has been lagging far behind Europe. In fact, Ontario will actually be the first jurisdiction in Canada to support such a policy. Speaker, this policy is about respecting workers’ time and privacy. It gives them a chance to relax and, importantly, de-stress after a long day of work.

Going into the details, Speaker, this legislation, if passed, would require employers of 25 or more employees to create a written disconnect-from-work policy. This policy can be adjusted to fit the business and the employers' workforce. If this legislation passes, upon royal assent, employers will have six months to create their initial policies. In addition, employers would also be required to provide a copy of the policy to each employee within 30 days of preparing or changing the policy. The policy can detail the expectations on response time for emails or encourage workers to shut off notifications once the workday concludes.

This is a policy that will benefit employers. It reduces burnout and it decreases job stress. Ultimately, employers can see higher level of engagement during the work hours. This is not a small measure; its lasting impact will be positive and felt right throughout our entire labour force.

Speaker, our province is a land of opportunity. We want to attract investments and talent inwards. This legislation will open new doors and jobs for workers. In particular, this legislation is proposing to ban the use of non-compete agreements. If the bill passes, Ontario will be the first Canadian province to ban non-competes. At first, this might feel like a major overhaul, but when it comes to competition, we want to present our province as fair and ready for new business. This change could cause concern among businesses; however, other laws such as non-disclosure agreements, patents and federal laws are in place to protect the entities' intellectual property or trade secrets. The heart of this change is creating a healthier environment for individuals to start a business with fresh ideas and thrive.

Notably, it breaks down barriers for the technology sector. Non-compete agreements are common in the technology sector. As research shows, removing these agreements from employment contracts could be very beneficial. For example, the state of Hawaii banned non-competes in the tech sector in 2015. Following this, there was an 11% increase in labour mobility and a 4% increase in wages.

Workers in the technology sector in Canada are relatively lower-paid compared to the United States. Ontario's average tech salary is 65% of the average US tech salary. Eliminating non-competes could create well-paying jobs and, importantly, it could spawn more entrepreneurs to create jobs for their own new and exciting projects. Further, it reduces a factor that will reduce and limit labour mobility—and it's not just the tech sector, of course; workers in every sector, from finance to health care and others, will benefit.

I just want to mention what the legal community has been saying about non-compete agreements more generally. Walter Yoo, an employment lawyer with Monkhouse Law, said, "Very few non-compete clauses have been enforced by Ontario courts, but they still had a psychological effect on staff." This is reiterated by many law firms in Ontario. We do not want people to feel stressed out or worried about clauses that may or may not be enforced. There are some exemptions allowed in the bill, which

include certain company executives and circumstances related to the sale of a business.

Speaker, attracting and retaining talent, not just domestically within Canada but globally, extends beyond the non-compete agreements. The proposed legislation would create a destination for newcomers to jump on their careers and quickly find greater economic opportunities. Newcomers choose Canada for rewarding opportunities and oftentimes create their own businesses. Newcomers work hard and we value the contributions they make.

It's apparent that the current system is burdensome for individuals who have trained extensively in another country and have professional experience outside of Canada. The current restrictions and requirements could be costing Ontario engineers, scientists and other professionals because of the conditions that must be completed in order to get a job. In 2016, only one quarter of internationally trained immigrants in regulated professions were working in a job that matched their level of qualification. I'm sure we all know or have heard of somebody who was underemployed because of the current system requirements.

Our government is proposing changes that would, if passed, help remove barriers for newcomers to find licensed jobs that match their qualifications and skills. These changes include:

- eliminating Canadian work experience requirements for professional registration and licensing, unless an exemption is granted based on a demonstrated public health and safety risk;

- reducing burdensome duplication for official-language proficiency testing so people would not have to complete multiple tests for the purposes of immigration and professional licensing;

- allowing applicants to register faster in their regulated professions when there are emergencies, such as a pandemic, that create an urgent need for certain professions or trades; and

- ensuring the licensing process is completed in a timely manner to help internationally trained immigrants start working in their careers that match their skill set.

In total, if this legislation passes, it would impact 23 trades and 14 professions such as lawyers, engineers, architects, plumbers and electricians. It is only right that someone who has spent a considerable amount of time and energy and money achieving their dream job is matched with and has an easier time finding employment that utilizes their skill set.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank the front-line workers who have been there since day one. We cannot forget the contributions that have been made during the most difficult time of this pandemic.

One group of workers that has been there to keep our economy moving and store shelves stocked are delivery and truck drivers. During this pandemic, our government allowed 24/7 deliveries to ensure goods were there when people needed them the most. Essential goods need to be transported, and drivers have stepped up. They were there when we needed them through the pandemic.

This proposed legislation is making a change to ensure that when a driver requires access to a bathroom, they have

one. We are proposing a change to require business owners to let delivery workers use their company's wash-room when they're delivering or picking up items. Introducing this measure is about respect and decency.

Speaker, as I conclude my remarks, the members on this side of the House are rebuilding this province. Our government is bringing jobs back. We witnessed hundreds of thousands of jobs leaving this province under the previous Liberal government because of the unsustainable environment they established. This is no longer the case, and these new measures will attract even more people to this great province.

1330

Speaker, we want well-paying jobs here. Our government has helped the business community. This legislation is another way to help support workers.

I hope the opposition members will join us in supporting this legislation, supporting workers.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocivic: Since we're on the topic of workers, I think this is something that needs to be discussed, and it has been brought up many times by New Democrats here—it's the process of deeming in this province. Because of deeming, many workers who are injured, who are unable to find a job and unable to live on the compensation that they're receiving, are forced onto social assistance and into poverty. Will this government commit to ending this practice?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

This legislation obviously pertains to certain areas related to workers. As I mentioned, there are a few other areas we touched on as well. I should add that it has quite broad support, actually, among the labour movement. A lot of the union leaders in this province, such as Jerry Dias from Unifor, Smokey Thomas from OPSEU, Joseph Mancinelli from LIUNA are supporting this legislation—broad support from union leaders, which typically has a lot of support within New Democrats.

So my question to you is, would you support this legislation if these union leaders are?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The process is that they ask the question and you give the answer.

The member for Mississauga–Lakeshore.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: First, I would like to thank the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development for this excellent bill, and his parliamentary assistant for working so hard on this.

Can the member, at a high level, explain more about how the Working for Workers Act will lift up workers and their families in Ontario?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Yes. Thank you to the member from my neighbouring riding, the great riding of Mississauga–Lakeshore for the question. There's a lot to answer in a very short time on that.

In terms of how this legislation is helping working families, there are many ways, and I touched on a few, but

I think the disconnect policy is certainly a major contributor to that. No jurisdiction in Canada has put forward legislation like this. We all know about the burnout, about the blending of work and home life today, which so many of us do. It's hard to put that time—there's no check-in and check-out, like many workers do, for example, in a factory where they check in and check out at a certain time. Many of us are always connected. I think the government putting a policy in place to encourage larger businesses to have a policy in place to disconnect will be tremendously beneficial to families.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'll answer that question, even though we're supposed to be asking the questions. Let's be clear: There isn't one union in this province that supports schedule 6. You didn't consult with the OFL, the Ontario Federation of Labour, which represents 1.2 million; you didn't consult with CUPE on schedule 6; you didn't consult with ATU; you didn't consult with the nurses' unions, the teachers. None of that was done.

So when you stand up and quote union leaders—there are parts of this bill that are good, but schedule 6 is a disgrace for the province of Ontario, when 50% of workers who are deemed are living in poverty. They're losing their homes; they're losing their communities; they're losing their families. That's why you can stand up and say, "Yes, there are parts in this bill that are good"—schedule 6 is a disaster for injured workers. We're begging you, quite frankly, to—

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is, why didn't you consult with all unions on schedule 6—which you didn't do, by the way.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Let me tell you something: This is a government that believes in consultation. We have consulted with dozens and dozens of organizations for all of our bills, including this bill.

Quite frankly, the Minister of Labour is a minister who has been the most open to talking to anybody, from any side of the aisle here. Minister McNaughton, the Minister of Labour, has been absolutely phenomenal and very open-minded in terms of listening to anybody.

Who have we consulted with? The Ontario College of Teachers—I think you mentioned teachers—the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the College of Pharmacists, the College of Midwives, Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario, the law society, kinesiologists, the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario. There are dozens and dozens. I have a list of them here; we can send that to you.

We're a government that is willing to listen.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question, the member for Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's always good to see you in the chair.

I want to start off by thanking the minister and his hard-working parliamentary assistant for putting this very important bill forward, which addresses many, many

issues—quite frankly, ones that the previous government consulted extensively on but did nothing about. It's this minister and this parliamentary assistant who have been putting them forward.

Speaker, the areas that I want to reference and ask the member to elaborate a little bit more on are the removal of the Canadian work experience—which will help a lot of new Canadians to be able to get the jobs that they have been trained for—and things like the access to a bathroom, all of these that are in this bill. There are just so many of them.

In particular, if you can just elaborate on why it's so important for this bill to be enacted now in this province—

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you for the thoughtful question. Again, there's a lot to digest, but I will start out with the issue around the bathroom access. To be quite frank, it's kind of sad that we even have to put this in. That there are some businesses that did actually deny workers, couriers, drivers access to a bathroom—it's a sad state. Unfortunately, there are bad actors everywhere—the majority are great, but there are some, and that's why we had to put this through legislation. I'll tell you, it has been so warmly received by the workers, by the delivery companies. They are ecstatic that we are thinking about them. No one even thought about this before, but definitely this has become an issue, and we're glad to see workers and businesses are overwhelmingly supportive of that.

With respect to foreign credentials, I think this is absolutely critical. We all know of so many workers here in Ontario who have such incredible professional credentials who are not able to apply them here in Ontario. To be able to fully access—it's great for them, and it's great for the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Ottawa Centre has a question.

Mr. Joel Harden: Speaker, I just want to say, through you to the member, that I plan to use this clip of what I'm about to say, so I really hope the question gets answered, because folks at home want this question to be answered. I'm going to pick up where my friend from Niagara Falls left off.

We know that under the previous Liberal governments, from 2010 to 2017, benefits for injured workers were cut in half. We also know that this government cut premiums to employers for WSIB by 52%. And we know that we have workers out there living in poverty, losing their homes because they are injured at work and because of this terrible practice of deeming at the WSIB.

Schedule 6 takes us backwards. It is an attack on injured workers.

So I'm asking the member sincerely, through you: Will he work with the opposition to take schedule 6 out of this bill? It's time Ontario stopped attacking injured workers and their families. Will deeming stop? Will he commit to stopping it? Will he insist his government pull schedule 6 out of this bill? Yes or no?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I'm happy to answer the question from the member from Ottawa Centre.

As I said earlier in my speech, our government is committed to helping workers in the province of Ontario. We are rebalancing the scales and putting workers in the driver's seat. We're leading the way, not only in Canada, but across North America. It's time we levelled the playing field and, quite frankly, lifted everyone up.

Looking to the future, we are not going to go back to where we were before. Workers are no longer getting their fair share of the economic pie. Our mission is to give workers a hand up for better jobs and bigger paycheques. This bill is about people who work hard, put in a good shift and take pride in their job. We are a province of opportunity, where hard work pays off and big dreams come to life. We have a plan to build a future for our great province, and I certainly hope the opposition will support all the great parts of this bill and support this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Niagara West has a quick question, if he wants an answer.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My question to the member is very brief: Why couldn't the other Liberal government, when they were in office, deliver on this priority? It was clearly something that we heard the opposition members pay lip service to—supporting workers and supporting the labour movement—yet they couldn't take real action when they had the opportunity, when they were propping the Liberal government up for many, many years. I'm just wondering if you could speak to why they weren't able to accomplish these tasks when they were in office.

1340

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): You have 10 seconds. Good luck.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay. Thank you to the member for that great question.

I think the opposition is getting very frustrated that the labour movement in Canada, much of it, is coming on side—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Ten means 10, not 20.

Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I hope that my colleagues on the other side actually listen, because I have a 20-minute speech and it's going to talk about some of the issues they raised.

To the member from Niagara West: The deeming part of the bill, although it was put in earlier—it only started to happen under the Liberal government in 2016. You keep talking about propping up a government. That was not part of that minority government at that time. It started in 2016, and that's when the benefits started to fall. That's when the billions of dollars were saved because they deemed workers. I'll explain deeming to you during my presentation.

If you're going to stand up and ask a question, my suggestion would be to look up the history on how deeming started to take effect and started to affect injured workers in the province of Ontario and threw them into poverty. They're now collecting ODSP or OW, living in poverty, and instead of the employer paying for WSIB, guess who's paying?

Mr. Speaker, you're from Windsor; you probably know about the auto plants. Guess who's doing it?

It's being done by taxpayers, through ODSP and OW. That's the history on deeming, and that's why deeming has to come out of schedule 6. That's the poison bill in this bill. We've said very clearly on this side that there are a lot of good things in the bill that we can support. Schedule 6 is an attack against injured workers. It's disgraceful in the province of Ontario.

When you talk about unions—I've already said about the union movement that they weren't consulted. The Ontario Federation of Labour represents 54 unions in the province of Ontario. You didn't even talk to them. So you can say that they're cuddling up to the Conservatives; no, they're not. You didn't even talk to the Ontario Federation of Labour. You didn't talk to CUPE, which represents 280,000 members in the province of Ontario. You didn't talk to the ATU. You didn't talk to the unions who represent high school teachers, elementary teachers. So, please, don't stand up and say you consulted; you didn't on schedule 6.

I'm asking you—somebody can yell it out—to name one union that has come to you and put it in writing that said they support schedule 6 and attacking injured workers. You can stand up and say whatever you want; there isn't one. I've talked to them all—not one.

Anyway, I'll start my speech. I apologize, but they get me going before I even stand up. Honest to God, I just wish they'd listen. If they listened, no worker—and I can say this, because you know what? I don't know how many of you guys worked in a plant, I don't know how many of you belonged to a union; I have no idea. I can stand up and talk about workers. I'm a worker. I came out of high school and went into General Motors. I went to work. As a matter of fact—a little off the subject—I took a four-year tech course, when we used to offer tech courses in high school, in public school. So when I went into a plant, I knew how to lock out, I knew about machinery, I knew about safety. So I can talk about workers.

I'll tell you what I did once I got married and had a family. Why did I go to work? Does anybody know? Yell it out. I wanted to get a paycheque so I could raise my family. The best way to do it—I got lucky; I went into a unionized workplace. Fair wages, fair benefits, a pension, good health and safety—all of those things were there for me.

What I didn't do is work in a plant to get injured and then be deemed and spend the rest of my life living in poverty, and lose my wife, lose my family, lose my identity, lose my community. That's what schedule 6 does. Why can't you get it? And don't tell me—I don't know how many there are; is it 70 of you guys? You've kicked so many out now, I don't know if you're almost even now. Whatever you guys are, you must be getting the same thing I'm getting—I'm sorry—including my friend from Niagara West. He's got to be hearing about injured workers coming to his office and talking about this.

No worker in the province of Ontario deserves to live in poverty because they got hurt on the job. You certainly

shouldn't get that when you're going to give \$3 billion to corporations.

We put an amendment in—I don't know if my colleagues know that—that we think was fair and reasonable, and I'll say it in my speech if I ever get to it. We put an amendment in that was fair and reasonable. You turned it down.

Do you know what else they did, Speaker? You're from Windsor. You've got a lot of auto plants in your area, a lot of unionized workers there. They just turned every one of our reasonable amendments down, didn't accept one of them, on schedule 6. The ones that I brought forward on schedule 6—they turned them all down, and they're reasonable. They were going to enhance the bill. They said no. As a matter of fact, the people who were there, outside of I think the parliamentary assistant there, said nothing. They basically just sat and there raised their hands—no, no, no. The party that's supposed to be the party of yes—that day, no, no, no, including amendments that were brought forward by the Liberals. They said no to their amendments too.

Anyway, I'll start my speech. Is that okay? All right. I've got six minutes—or 14 minutes left.

I just get wound up because it bothers me, it drives me nuts, honestly, in my soul, to know that an injured worker is living in poverty and they can fix it. The Liberals didn't fix it. They caused the problem. They started using deeming. It started under the Liberals. I'm not denying that. You've got a majority government. You can fix that. If you take schedule 6 out of the bill, you've got unanimous support on this side of the room. We know that. You can all have your heads down and not look at me and not listen. I'm looking at you. I'm looking at the Speaker, too, because I'm supposed to go through the Speaker, but I'm looking over there. Pay attention. It's important, because you've got workers.

Anyway, I'll start my speech before I don't have any time left.

I rise today on Bill 27, Working for Workers Act, and how the PCs have conducted themselves with this bill. As my NDP colleagues and I made clear, there are many pieces of this bill that we can support, things that we have been calling to implement for years, yet they exist beside schedule 6, which is designed to deny justice to injured workers and to send money back to employers, including some that have killed workers in their workplace.

Let me say this as clear as possible: If schedule 6 isn't reformed, it must be cut from this bill. This government loves cutting government services so much. Well, schedule 6 is one that they should cut. That's for sure.

Speaker, we tried to work with the Conservative government during the committee process to pass common-sense amendments to this bill. The amendments were not political. They were designed to strengthen the bill—some things like expanding washroom access to a wider class of workers. We had the president of ATU, who they didn't consult, almost in tears at the committee talking about his members who can't go to the washroom. They're not included in the bill. People who have medical conditions,

diabetes—not included. Women—I don't even know if I can say this; I think I can—would have their—help me out here—

Interjection.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes, that. They would bleed through their pants and would cry. It upset them, yet we said no to allowing them to be included in the bill. The president of the union—you know; you were there—was passionate. He was almost in tears because that's what his members are going through. It's not fair. It's not right. An amendment that I think we could support—you turned it down, and the PCs wouldn't even listen to that. When the power unions and ATU said, "The washroom provisions are good, but here are a few workers who are left out," the PCs did nothing at committee except turn it down.

We tried to tighten up the rules so foreign workers would be protected; the PCs refused to listen. Now because of the Conservative government bill, companies like Fiera Foods are able to hide behind loopholes and still receive payments from the government, who are telling them they're safe employers. Let's get it straight: \$3 billion is going to be going to employers. Fiera Foods will get it, and five workers died in that workplace, two under your watch—brothers and sisters over there, two on your watch.

I'm not asking for much here. They need to explain why they refused to listen to any amendments in this bill. They need to explain why they drafted a bill, called it Working for Workers, and then pretended to be for all workers, yet didn't even consult the OFL and their 1.3 million workers. They didn't consult CUPE—I've got them listed here—ATU or the building trades. Tell me why you wouldn't do that.

1350

Tell me a union that's going to support schedule 6. Most of all, they need to answer to schedule 6. Schedule 6 is added to the bill; we could support it if we got rid of it. What does it send? Around \$3 billion of WSIB money, workers' money, back to employers like Fiera Foods, which I just mentioned. They do this despite the fact that nearly 50%—listen to this. Get your heads out of those computers. Listen to this because it's our friends, our neighbours who just go to work—50% of injured workers in Ontario today who are deemed live in poverty. They could be your friends, Speaker, my friends, my relatives—just because they want to provide for their family. It's awful.

The government knows this is happening on their watch. They refuse to act. The government knows this is happening to Ontario workers, and in turning down our amendments, it sends a message that you don't care about injured workers.

We asked for simple amendments to this bill. The amendment was to—now listen. This was even better, guys and ladies; "brothers and sisters" is probably the easiest way to say it. The amendment that we put forward was the language that was used in the province of Alberta. Does anybody on your side know who the Premier of the province of Alberta is and what party it is? It's a Conservative government. It was the same language. Instead of

sending money back to only employers—and this is what the language does—we asked them to send it to the workers first, then their employers. What I'm saying there is, take care of the workers. Use some of that money for better training, and then, if there is money left over of the \$3 billion that you're taking from the workers, then do what they did in Alberta and give it to the employers. Again, as a worker, I'm thinking, that seems like a pretty good compromise. It's a win-win. Workers aren't living in poverty. We're giving more money to employers to help them with training. They turned it down; I have no idea why. Instead of making workplaces safer and giving justice to injured workers who are struggling to feed themselves, this government voted down the amendment and is giving the money to employers.

I want to take a moment to talk about one of the biggest black marks on this Conservative government, something they could fix and they refuse doing it, and that's deeming. I had my colleagues talk about deeming already. I know the members opposite already know what deeming is; I know that because I've spoken about it many times. Injured workers in their communities have spoken to them about it. And because they refuse to pass Bill 119, which would have banned deeming in Ontario, injured workers continue to be victimized by this practice.

Here's the definition of deeming for those who are watching at home. It's important to note that the Conservative government knows this is happening and supports it. This is from the Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups: "Deeming is this mechanism by which WSIB pretends that one is able to work a full-time job and then deducts those imaginary wages from this phantom job from one's loss of earnings. If deeming involved real jobs the worker is suitable for, with real wages, we wouldn't have a problem. But when deeming involves telling an injured worker they could be a full-time greeter at Walmart, we have a problem, especially since we know Walmart doesn't hire full-time greeters. Or a high-rise window cleaner who fell and broke both ankles being told he could be a parking lot attendant or a light assembler, even though his doctor ruled these were" jobs not suitable for him, "or even available in his area." It sounds shocking, but that's what happens in Ontario.

The WSIB literally says that injured workers have a job that doesn't exist and then slashes their benefit. This is why, in 2010, WSIB was paying workers \$4.8 billion in benefits—do you know what they pay today? My colleague spoke very passionately about what's going on—\$2.3 billion, less than half, since they started to deem employees. Do the math here. This is where this so-called surplus came from—on the backs of injured workers. It's not that the government was good with the money and saved it; they just stopped paying injured workers. It's what happened.

Do you know where those injured workers go after this? On social assistance. That's right. The WSIB gets out of paying it, and the taxpayers step in. To be clear, while employers are gifted billions of dollars meant for injured workers, those injured workers are forced on social assistance. So instead of the employers who are responsible for

the injuries or the deaths at their workplace being held accountable, the PC government sends the bill to the taxpayer. Think about that. Instead of the employer paying, everybody in the province of Ontario is paying it with their taxes, and then we give the employers \$3 billion. It makes no sense to me; I'm sorry.

Injured workers in Ontario have been trying for decades to get this fixed. In 2019, they even appealed to the United Nations to try to get Ontario to outlaw this practice. Here's the story they shared with the world of what happened here in Ontario—this is about a worker named Harvey. Harvey worked as a high-rise window cleaner. In 1995, the clips on a ladder extension broke, and he fell 44 feet. His right foot took the full impact of the fall, shattering his ankle and turning his heel into dust. A year later, he managed to return to his job on a rebuilt foot.

In July 2009, though, Harvey sustained another injury to the same foot. He couldn't walk and needed surgery. Harvey was still waiting to see a surgeon when the WSIB deemed him to be able to work as a parking lot attendant or a light assembler—jobs that were not actually suitable or available to him. With his phantom job and deemed wages, Harvey's compensation was reduced to—listen to this, colleagues—\$419 per month; not per week, per month; less than \$20 a day, much less than he earned before the injury. He and his wife, Evelyn, were forced onto social assistance. Harvey had never been put in this position before. He started working at the age of 15 and was very proud.

I'm going to skip a couple of these and get into another story because I've only got three and a half minutes left.

I want to turn to another group the minister knows about and won't meet with: Occupational Disease Reform Alliance. For those at home, this is a group of injured workers, widows and widowers of workers who contracted an occupational disease from their workplace.

As many of you know, I come from a manufacturing plant. I know for a fact that there isn't a person in those plants who goes to work and agrees to get cancer and cut their lives short. What they want to do is feed their families; they want to provide for their families. No one should die because of that, yet here in Ontario they do. They get sick and WSIB ignores them.

Speaker, the ODRA has representatives—and I want the Conservatives to listen to this because it's important. I'm trying to be fair and balanced here; I really am. They come from Sarnia, represented by a PC; Dryden, PC; Sault Ste. Marie, PC; Niagara—we have the colleague here from the PCs; Peterborough, represented by PCs; there are more communities. This is not just an NDP problem; it's a problem right across the province—Liberals, but more Conservatives. They are workers and families who live in ridings across Ontario, in Conservative ridings. They are begging for justice, just like I'm begging you guys.

But you don't have to take it from me; take it from a family. I want to look at this: Janice Hobbs Martell is the daughter of Jim Hobbs, a hard-working man who just wanted to provide for his family. Her submission was incredibly moving, and I hope you all read it. The line that got me—she said:

“I am fully aware that this is a majority government and that if you choose to do so, you can enact schedule 6 of Bill 27 into law. But what you cannot do is claim that you did not know that such a decision will harm workers and families in this province. That is the purpose of this submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy: to ensure that you understand the gravity and the impacts that such a decision will have on workers and families like mine.”

This is from Jean Simpson from Sarnia:

“Bud was a 36-year employee for Fiberglas Sarnia when the plant closed in 1991. Within six months of the plant closing he became sick. With CT scans, 110 radiation treatments on his head, losing all his teeth, being fed through a feeding tube, and talk of removing his nose, I could never imagine that WSIB would wage war against my family for so long. They have been unrelenting in their pursuit to deny that his workplace exposures caused his illness and ultimately his death. I fear that my husband's WSIB claim will outlive me.

“I recently heard that WSIB refunded employer contributions in the millions of dollars. How can this be allowed to happen when my husband's claim and others like his go unresolved? I want justice for Bud and myself, and I don't want others to suffer and go through the trauma this broken system has put me through for the past 20-plus years.”

1400

I have 29 seconds. I'll try to get through this. This is another: “approximately 20 years when she was diagnosed with kidney and liver cancer. She fought for seven and a half months before she” died of “her illness, leaving behind to two beautiful young daughters for me to raise on my own. Kathy's claim for WSIB was denied and I am in an appeal at this time. This February”—think about this; I've got seven seconds—“will be eight years of fighting for compensation. Her daughters deserve to be compensated for growing up without a mother. To get married and plan a wedding alone. To have children and no grandmother to share the joy. Compensation needs to recognize occupational illness and do the right thing.”

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for questions. First question, the member from Whitby.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Within this particular legislation, there are aspects that speak to the skilled trades system and breaking the stigma and allowing young men and young women to get jobs that they otherwise wouldn't be able to through the training that underpins some of the aspects of this legislation.

Why is the opposition not supporting training to help people get into better jobs?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I certainly appreciate the question.

Do you know who came and talked on schedule 6? The skilled trades. The building trades came to committee, and you didn't listen to them either. You say you care about skilled trades. Skilled trades are getting hurt on the job, just like everywhere else. Nineteen skilled trades have died this year; do you know that? A 19-year-old boy, a

labourer—I think it was in London—was killed on the job. He had a little baby.

The skilled trades came and said schedule 6 is wrong. We understand the importance of skilled trades. I took a four-year course. I did woodworking, I did electrical. I did welding. I did all that stuff. I understand how important trades are. Trades are getting hurt on the job, and because of deeming, they're not reporting it. Do you know what they do? They go on opioids, and then they get hooked—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Ten seconds.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay, I'm done. Thank you. Go ahead.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to thank the member. He's really an expert and a fighter on the issue of workers' rights. We could all learn something from him here. I know that he spoke very passionately and some of what he said was cut short for his speech. I just want to ask, if there is anything else to elaborate on, if he has a little more time, could he please share that?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I didn't get to a couple of things, quite frankly. One that should be in the bill—off of schedule 6—should be to repeal Bill 124. Every day, we hear you guys call health care workers heroes. We ask a question, and you say they're heroes. But you can't say they're heroes when you attack their collective agreements through Bill 124. You can't attack them and say they're heroes when you cut their wages and put it at 1%, when we know—the last two months, 3.7% inflation, and 4.7% this month, so that means that's a 3.7% cut to those health care workers in their buying power. We see what's going on. I say to you, you could have included Bill 124 in the bill. They chose not to. I appreciate you giving me the opportunity to talk about that.

They could have talked about casino workers in my area and in the Speaker's area who can't find jobs. They're operating at 60% of the workers. Some are working full-time. Some are working part-time. What are you doing for casino workers to get them through the winter? What are we going to do for the tourism sector, which is hurting right now right across the province of Ontario? Nothing in the bill for tourism—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. You're done.

The member for Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member from Niagara Falls for his speech. I gather from that he doesn't like schedule 6 of the bill, for sure. That was communicated rather clearly.

In 2016, only one quarter of internationally trained immigrants in regulated professions were working jobs that matched their level of qualification. This obviously costs families a lot of money, and it costs the economy a lot of money.

There are proposed changes to remove these barriers for newcomers in this bill. I'm wondering if the member supports these changes that are proposed in the bill?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes, I am passionate about schedule 6. I think it's a disgrace, quite frankly, and certainly an attack on workers and injured workers of the province of Ontario.

As far as internationally trained workers coming to our country and utilizing their expertise and their qualifications, in 2002—you might not know this: I ran seven times before I actually won an election. I ran as an MP, and that was one of the things I ran on. It didn't make any sense to me that they were driving cabs or doing jobs outside of their scope of expertise when we needed them, quite frankly, here in the province of Ontario. At that time, I was running to be an MP, which is a little higher-level than where we are here. I ran against a nice guy. He was a Conservative—Rob Nicholson. He beat me twice. I finally got smart and didn't run against him anymore. It didn't make sense to me. With this issue here, internationally trained—absolutely, it's something that we should be taking a look at. We actually brought a couple of amendments that we thought would make the bill stronger, and guess what happened? Speaker, what do you think happened? They turned them down.

I'm not looking for a fight on the bill. What I'm saying is, let's make the bill the best it can be, because these bills don't come up—the next bill might come up in another six or eight years—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you very much. The member for Ottawa Centre has a question.

Mr. Joel Harden: Speaker, I always love hearing my friend from Niagara Falls talk in this place, because he brings decades of experience working for workers from a practical level.

As I'm listening to the debate, my friend, in towns you mentioned, represented by Conservatives—Peterborough, Oakville; we could go on and on. In the time you have in this question and answer, do you have a message for those families who are watching this government not answer the question about what they're prepared to do for injured workers and their families—not willing to change deeming, not willing to watch the \$6-billion surplus that they appear to be looking at as a cash cow for employers like Fiera Foods, who have killed workers on the job. Do you have a message for those families who may be watching this, now, my friend, about what they should do next June, who they should be voting for, what priorities should be available to them?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I think it's pretty clear that if you don't fix it, when we become government in June, we'll fix it.

I think the message is clear, and I think, as the colleague there said, this isn't new today. I've been raising this for a number of years, since I've been here. We need to take care of injured workers. And what can they do? Go to their offices. Go to Peterborough, to the GE plant. I think it was less than 20% of those workers who got compensation. Go to Sarnia and talk to their MPP. Don't give up. I'm not going to give up. I'm going to continue to do what I have to do in here to try to convince my colleagues to strengthen the bill, get rid of schedule 6, undo deeming. But failing

that, go to their offices. Go with the injured workers. Tell them the stories.

I didn't get to all the stories; I've got five or six more stories. I almost break down crying when I hear it.

You think about it—and you guys have got to hear it; you guys have got to feel the same way I do. I know you're human beings. I know you've got to care about your people in your community—

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: My question to the member is a topic that is a component of this bill that hasn't come up at this point today. Unfortunately, I didn't have time to talk about it in the limited time I had, and you didn't talk about it as well; perhaps some other members will today. With respect to the predatory temp agencies—I know it has been a huge issue of concern to Ontarians. I'll quote Warren “Smokey” Thomas, the president of OPSEU: “I'm proud to say, and pleased to see, that all our work with Minister McNaughton and his staff is paying off. So much can be achieved through conversation and collaboration, instead of just name-calling. This government is listening to us, and as a result, real working people will benefit.”

What are your thoughts on this component of the bill with respect to predatory temp agencies?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate you giving me the opportunity to give you an example, because, as you know—or I think the assistant to Monte will know—we brought forward an amendment to strengthen that very language, and guess what happened? You turned it down. And where did it come from? Quite frankly, it came from Fiera Foods.

Fiera Foods—five people died; two on your watch. You guys were in government when two of them died. They came from a temp agency, they worked at Fiera Foods, so the entire liability for Fiera Foods is gone; it's on the temp agency. So what you're going to see in this \$3 billion—Fiera Foods is going to be a safe employer and will probably get a fair amount of money. I would think at least \$1 million, maybe, out of the \$1 billion—I can't comprehend how much \$1 billion is.

So what I'm saying to you is that you're absolutely right, but we put amendments in to make it stronger so places like Fiera Foods couldn't do this.

1410

The last guy who died there—do you know how long he was a temporary employee?

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: Does anybody know? I've got 10 seconds. He was a temporary employee for 20 years. How are you a temporary employee for 20 years?

We brought forward, like I said, fair and balanced amendments, and you turned them down. I'm trying to work with you. Pay attention. Not just Conservatives—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you very much. We don't have time for another question on this speaker, but we do have time for further debate.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I'm proud to rise this afternoon for the third reading of Bill 27, the Working for Workers

Act, introduced by the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development. I'd like to thank him and his team, including his parliamentary assistant from Mississauga–Malton, for all their great work on this bill, including a truly historic reform for workers and for newcomers, based on the expert recommendations of the Ontario Workforce Recovery Advisory Committee and their extensive consultation with workers, unions and employees.

Back in 2013, the Conference Board of Canada estimated that Ontario's skills gap cost our economy over \$24 billion, or about 4% of provincial GDP, because hundreds of thousands of skilled jobs are left vacant across the province. This is, in part, because of stigma against the skilled trades.

It was great to see the minister announce a \$90-million program last week to help attract more young people to in-demand careers in the skilled trades, which offer six-figure salaries and defined-benefit pensions.

We also have a skills gap because of unfair barriers, like requirements for Canadian working experience, that prevent new Canadians from getting the licences or accreditation they need to fully apply their skills in the jobs that best match their backgrounds and qualifications. I know the member from Mississauga–Malton and the member from Mississauga–Erin Mills both experienced this when they first came to Canada, and despite their degrees and expertise in chemical engineering and information technology, they weren't able to work in the jobs that matched their skills. The member from Mississauga–Erin Mills worked at Tim Hortons to support his family. And we know that today in Mississauga many skilled professionals are working as taxi or Uber drivers.

As the minister said, in 2016, up to three quarters of internationally trained immigrants were working in jobs that didn't match their level of skills or expertise. Speaker, as we recover from COVID-19, this is a mismatch that Ontario cannot afford any longer.

As the minister said, if we're going to tackle the generational labour shortage in Ontario, we need everyone participating: “Unlocking the full potential of skilled newcomers is critical to building back a stronger province.”

If passed, schedule 1 and schedule 3 of Bill 27 would help to remove barriers for internationally trained professionals and allow them to match their skills to the jobs we need to fill in Ontario. It would do this in three ways: firstly, by eliminating unfair requirements for Canadian working experience unless required for public health and safety; secondly, by reducing and simplifying the language tests; and lastly, by ensuring all licence applications are processed as quickly as possible. With these changes, Ontario would become the first province to level the playing field for skilled professionals. The truth is, these reforms are long overdue. As the parliamentary assistant said, they could increase Ontario's GDP by \$12 billion to \$20 billion each year. That would mean between \$2 billion to \$3 billion in new provincial tax revenue every year to help support health care and education, and all the other programs and services Ontarians rely on.

Speaker, I had the privilege to join the Standing Committee on Social Policy for some of the public hearings on

Bill 27, and I want to thank everyone who contributed—in particular, my friend Tonie Chaltas, the CEO of Achēv, one of the largest providers of employment services for new Canadians in Peel, who told us, “We need to make it as easy as possible for newcomers to Ontario to find jobs, settle into their communities, and build a life here.” Speaker, we agree.

This bill is just one of the parts of the government’s \$1.5-billion skilled trades strategy, which includes new training initiatives and simplifying the apprenticeship system so that young people, especially from under-represented groups, have access to more opportunities for on-the-job training.

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to join the minister at the construction site for the Indwell Lakeshore Lofts in Mississauga–Lakeshore, which will include 68 affordable housing units for people with disabilities. Together we announced a million-dollar investment to help the Christian Labour Association of Canada, based in Mississauga, provide hundreds of construction workers with free online and flexible training for leadership roles. There are similar projects planned or under way right across the province.

If passed, Bill 27 would also protect new Canadians from exploitation by temporary help agencies. Offenders would face the highest fines in Canada and possibly jail time.

Schedule 2 will also protect workers from non-compete agreements that are unfair, limiting their movement. As Chris Albinson, CEO of Communitech, explained, this will help level the playing field with places like Silicon Valley and help Ontario attract the best high-tech workers in North America.

Schedule 5 of Bill 27 would, if passed, require businesses to provide access to washrooms for drivers picking up or delivering goods. As Purolator wrote on behalf of their 2,700 drivers, this reflects the critical role these front-line heroes have played throughout this pandemic. The president of the Ontario Trucking Association, Stephen Laskowski, said that this law will serve as a model for other provinces and states across North America. I hope he’s right.

Speaker, before I was elected, I worked for Ford Motor Co. for over 31 years and I was a dues-paying member of Unifor 707. Our national president, Jerry Dias, said, “We commend the government for listening to advocates and community members and introducing these changes,” which are moving in the right direction.

Again, I also want to commend the minister and his team for working together with union leaders, not just on Bill 27, but throughout this pandemic. Last year, we worked together with Unifor to help retool the production line of Ford Canada to make hundreds of thousands of face shields and other PPE for front-line health workers. More recently, we’ve worked together on the increase of the minimum wage, after inflation hit 4.7% last month—the highest rate in almost 20 years.

Smokey Thomas, the president of OPSEU, said, “For the first time in dealing with three governments, we actually have a government that is listening, and actually

doing some very positive things for working people. No matter what any party does,” he said, “especially the Conservatives, it will never be enough for some members of the labour movement. It will always be too late ... they’ll find something to criticize.” But “so much can be achieved through conversation and collaboration, instead of just name-calling. This government is listening to us, and as a result, real working people will benefit.”

Last Thursday, on *The Agenda* with Steve Paikin, Victoria Mancinelli, director of public relations of LIUNA Canada, said, “When it comes to the skilled trades portfolio, we have not seen a level of commitment to advancing the skilled trades in Ontario as we have in this government, and that’s a testament to the leadership of Minister McNaughton, who has enacted transformative policies to strengthen opportunities for our members.” This includes Bill 27. But she also included the construction of new infrastructure, like the Highway 413 corridor, which will generate up to \$350 million in GDP each year and support an average of 3,500 construction jobs, many of which will be filled by LIUNA members, including many from Mississauga.

1420

There are about 100,000 members at LIUNA Canada, of which about 90% work in construction, and LIUNA Local 183 is the largest construction union in North America. But as the minister said, over the next decade Ontario will need about 100,000 new workers in our construction sector alone just to replace those who retire. That’s the scale of the challenge ahead of us, replacing the equivalent of LIUNA Canada over the next decade, but I know the measures in Bill 27 will help us get there, close the skill gap and ensure Ontario remains the best place in the world to work, live and raise a family.

I’ll conclude by asking all members to join me in voting for this very important bill. And with that, Mr. Speaker, I move that the question now be put.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Mr. Cuzzetto has moved that the question now be put. There have been over six and a half hours of debate and 13 speakers. 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 will please say “aye.”

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

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred to the next instance of deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 24, 2021, on the motion for an address in reply to the speech of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the session.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: As I was saying earlier in debate, I believe it was last week sometime, the government throne speech gives us an opportunity to speak to a number of things that the government is doing or is not doing. What I focused on last week was a lot about how affordability has become a huge issue through this pandemic. Now, we all understand—and I don't want people to think I blame the government for all the price increases that we see across the world, because clearly it is driven by this pandemic in a number of different ways, and I won't get into that. But the point that I was trying to make in that debate was that, in fact, the government says the right things when it comes to dealing with price-gouging—in fact, they've got some kind of a process set up in order to be able to deal with that—but there is not much being done when it comes to actually dealing with the gouging. I was pointing out some of the cost increases that we've seen over the last couple of years that have really driven people when it comes to their home budgets, quite frankly, in a very difficult way. We see everything from the price of groceries, the price of gas, the price of almost everything—when you look at the price of materials, they are just going through the roof.

The point that I was making last week was people measure governments by, “Am I any better off now than I was then, when the government came to power three and a half years ago?” And I think the answer is no. I think the reality, Mr. Speaker, is people will find that they're not better off, because the government does all the right press conferences—the one thing I'll say about the Premier: He goes and gives press conferences and he says the right things, but when it comes to actions, being able to deal with actually doing what he says in his comments, it's quite the opposite.

I was at committee last week on emergency management as a regular member of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight. We had the Solicitor General there, who I have a lot of respect for. I've worked with her through this pandemic on a number of issues for my constituency and overall through the province, and I'm happy that we have a good relationship and that we're able to move some things forward. But one of the questions I asked her was—and it's the same question that my friend from Humber River–Black Creek has raised. The government set up this process in order to be able to deal with price gouging, and I asked the minister at committee—I said, “Listen, can you tell us how many complaints have been filed and detail for us what investigations have taken place as a result of those complaints, and what results have ensued?” She wouldn't answer the question. I asked it three or four times in different ways, hoping that the minister would actually allow us to get to the root of that particular issue, and the minister essentially refused to answer. Part of the problem is that when the government set up this committee, they made it that the mandate is so tight that, as a member of the committee, I can't even request that that question be moved as a motion at committee.

The government says they're transparent. Oh, my God, these guys are not transparent. This government is one of

the worst, when it comes to transparency, in the almost 32 years that I've been here.

If you have a select committee, you should at least have the ability to move a motion in order to ask the minister to provide that information to the committee, and if the government, the majority, wants to say no, let them say no. That's their right. I'm not going to argue that the government doesn't have the right to vote one way or another. But at least, as a member of the committee either on the government side or the opposition side, we should have an ability to ask the question, and then the government should have the ability to be able to say yea or nay. But neither of us can do that, because the government restricted the ability of this committee to even ask the question.

So when the government stands up—as the minister was saying last week, to his thing that “We're the most transparent government, and we are working together, and we're non-partisan”—my God, this is one of the most partisan, non-transparent governments that I've served under in the last number of years that I've been here.

So Mr. Speaker, it leaves a lot to be desired—what this government has done when it comes to how they've dealt with COVID, and that's going to be the second part of what I want to talk about.

We heard the Auditor General, this week, say the government underspent money that they got from the federal government to be able to deal with how to navigate our way out of this pandemic. There was money for things like public health, money for things like education, money for different things that the federal government gave the province to be able to better cope with dealing with this pandemic. What the auditor came back and said is that in fact the government has underspent literally in the billions of dollars the amount of money that they got from the federal government and left that inside the general revenue fund in order to deal with their deficit numbers. I know the government is going to say, “Oh, yes, that's because we're great managers. We're not spending that money.” Well, the federal government gave you the money in order to be able to deal with things like smaller class sizes.

We have been saying on this side of the House—our education critic, our leader, Andrea Horwath, and pretty well every member of this caucus has been saying from the beginning that one of the places that we have to really do a better job is to lower the class sizes so that we don't have as many young people in proximity to each other who can spread the virus and then bring it back home, and then it's spread across the workplace and across different parts of Ontario. The government decided not to spend that money, and they've left class sizes the way they are. In some cases, class sizes have gotten bigger. There are a few cases where they may have gotten smaller. But by and large, class sizes have gotten larger. You look at, up until recently—and we're very happy that the federal government has approved vaccines for ages five to 11, because that's certainly going to help us with at least the Alpha and the Beta component of coronavirus. Who knows what this Omicron that's coming out—that's the other thing; they called it Omicron. I feel like I'm in a science fiction movie

when they start calling a virus Omicron, but that's a whole other issue.

My point is, the government did not use that money to lower class sizes when we knew that young people at that age could not be vaccinated. So why would the government make that decision? The money was given to them by the federal government to do exactly that, and the government decided, "No, we're going to use this to try to lower our deficit numbers." As a social democrat, I accept that we need to be prudent with the money we're given by taxpayers to be able to spend as wisely as we can. But what is very clear is that that money was given in order to deal with issues like smaller class sizes, and the government decided not to. As a result, we're seeing the cases go up and up and up, and that's just with the current viruses that are circulating through the province, let alone Omicron. So Mr. Speaker, the government can say all it wants when it comes to the great job that they're doing, but the reality is that their actions don't meet their words.

1430

The other thing that I spoke about earlier, and I've only got a couple of minutes and I just want to touch on this: The government came to office and one of the first things they did is that they tried to restructure public health so that it was going to be a smaller entity than it is now. Our public health unit in northern Ontario became humongous. What it meant to say is that decisions being made in places like Thunder Bay, Timmins or Manitoulin would have been made by one particular public health unit that was, in a way, in a bad place to make those kind of decisions. And they were going to cut the funding—and in fact they did. Public health funding went down \$600 million under this government, in the middle of a pandemic.

So the government can stand up all it wants and say that they're doing great things—and I don't argue that everything that the government did in this pandemic was bad. A clock is right twice a day. The government certainly made some decisions that, I think in the end, were the right things to do. But most of those decisions they were either pushed to make, such as having vaccine mandates—the Premier originally was opposed, and it wasn't until the official opposition and the rest of the medical community said, "No, no, we need to go this way," did the Premier finally realize he had to change his way.

I just say to the government across the way, every government tries as best as they can to be able to deal with the issues that are confronting them. The government, to a certain extent, has tried to do that. But don't stand in this House and talk about how great you are and how all your decisions have been the right ones, because there are all kinds of people in Ontario who will argue that, in fact, the decisions you made were either slow in coming or were wrong.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mr. Lorne Coe: In my riding, not unlike other ridings, some of the residents face a health challenge. They need to be confident that the care is going to be there for their

families and the treatment they require. That's one of the reasons why, as a government, we invested an additional \$1.8 billion into the hospital sector. Overall, it's about \$5.1 billion.

A portion of those investments supported more than 3,100 hospitals, including Lakeridge Health in my riding, going forward. Why did the Ontario NDP, though, vote no to those investments in Ontario's hospital sector?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to say to the member that I know your riding well. My grandson, who's a page here and who you've taken a picture with, and my daughter live in your riding. You're their MPP, as you well know; I tease you about that all the time. In fact, I was there on Saturday putting up Christmas lights at my daughter's house, who lives in Whitby. My point is, she's a nurse practitioner and works within the health system. As I talk to people in the health system, things are not as rosy as you make them out to be.

The problem is, the Liberals, while in government, underfunded hospitals to a point that they were failing. You've managed to put some of the money back; yes, that's true. But we have not gotten to where we need to be in order to make sure that our health care system is able to respond in the way that it is. So although your government has done something, it has certainly not gone in the direction or to the limit that it has to be.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Algoma–Manitoulin has a question.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'm so glad that the member was speaking about public health, because I have this nice resolution that was just sent to the minister. It's from the board of Algoma Public Health. The resolution reads: "Board of health for the district of Algoma Public Health writes to the Ontario Minister of Health to request that the provincial government commit to increased base funding to local public health units, with particular attention to addressing long-standing public health human resource challenges in the north, such that public health units are able to both continue a robust pandemic response, and restore the delivery of mandated public health services to Ontario citizens." I couldn't agree more with that.

This is what a lot of our public health units are doing. They're the front-line workers, as well as other front-line workers who are there to help us. I ask the member: Do you agree with something like this?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. Just because the Liberals were wrong and underfunded public health to the degree that they did, and privatized a large part of the public health system, it shouldn't be that the Conservative government decides to do the same and increase it just a little bit. Public health, as we found out in this pandemic, is key, is paramount to being able to deal with this particular pandemic, and if you underfund it and you tie its hands in being able to do its work, we're not going to be in a good place.

So Mr. Speaker, yes, I agree with what was written in that resolution, and the government should take heed of what the public health units are saying.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My question to the member opposite is really about the place of Ontario within the Canadian federation: as you know, an economic engine of this country. The government of Ontario believes firmly, under the leadership of Premier Ford, that it's important that we advocate for, frankly, what Ontarians deserve from the federal government.

One of those areas is the Canada Health Transfer, where we've unfortunately seen the Canada Health Transfer fail to rise commensurate to the increase in expenditures for the health care system, and I'm wondering if the NDP, under the leadership of Ms. Horwath, would be willing to stand with our government in advocating to the federal Liberals for increased health transfers for our province.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I was part of the 1990-95 NDP government. It was us who were arguing with the federal government that we needed our fair share. I agree with the concept that the government is making, but when you're not spending what they're giving you in transfers, it doesn't make for a good argument when it comes to "I want more." How can the government on the one hand go to the federal government, knock at the door and say, "Give me more money," when you're not spending what they're giving you?

Yes, the federal government has to stand up, and it has got to give what we need to be able to run our health system and others, but it is also incumbent upon us as governments provincially to do what we say we're going to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Humber River–Black Creek has a question.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Following the throne speech, I was hoping to hear some leadership from the Premier and this government on the issue of insurance in Ontario. We are seeing rising auto insurance rates; we pay the highest in North America coming out of this pandemic. We have seen certain types of drivers, like taxi drivers, at risk of losing any form of insurance. We're seeing commercial insurance rates double and even triple when businesses were closed during this pandemic, and yet not a peep from this government on insurance. I'm wondering: Why do you think that is?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Insurance companies will charge what they can to make a profit. It's like anybody. If I have an ability to run a business and I can raise my prices—and it doesn't make you a bad person; it's just the nature of business to make more profit—of course you will. If you can reduce costs, of course you will. But there are certain things that we need to be able to make sure are affordable to businesses and individuals, and auto insurance, truck insurance, taxi insurance and fleet insurance are one of them.

We've seen the price of insurance go through the roof, to the point that there are companies that are unable to get insurance because they can't even be insured anymore. So yes, we need to do something in order to deal with this, because it is a real problem.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: It's always interesting listening to the member opposite. I have a question on a topic which hasn't come up, as well, which is specifically the greenbelt. As you may be aware, we've got about 800,000 hectares in the greater Golden Horseshoe for the greenbelt, and we know that the greenbelt plays an important role in preserving green space. In fact, our government has launched the biggest consultation in the history of Ontario to expand the greenbelt, which is forthcoming, including an area, an urban river valley, in Oakville, Fourteen Mile Creek, which our town is delighted about.

But I would like to ask the member opposite why the opposition voted no to expand the greenbelt and help my community and a lot of the communities here in the Golden Horseshoe.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, I think we can all agree that the greenbelt is something that we need to protect, on both sides of the House. There's no argument there. But you don't build the 413 and expect that the greenbelt is going to maintain the way it was or get better. The reality is that one thing we've learned through this pandemic is that we need to be able to grow, within Ontario, as much of our food as we can because we cannot rely on people outside in a time of a pandemic, or other times. If we're expanding the greenbelt, it's going to reduce the amount of land we've got to be able to farm and to produce foods for the Ontario market.

1440

Your government has a funny way of saying you're green. You're green with a lot of brown, is all I'm going to say.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Spadina–Fort York has a question.

Mr. Chris Glover: I always enjoy listening to the member from Timmins. He's one of three members who has been in this Legislature since 1990, and so as we're debating the throne speech today, he's one of the few members who has been here for many, many throne speeches. He has also taught me a lot about how this Legislature has become less democratic over those 30 years that he has been a representative here.

Just during this government, we've seen the government vote to use the "notwithstanding" clause to strip people of their basic constitutional rights three times. We've seen them introduce legislation that politicizes the appointment of judges, and we've seen them directly interfere with municipal elections that were in process and then actually "win" a Supreme Court decision which says we do not, in Canada, have the right to free and fair municipal elections—only provincial and federal.

My question to the member is, how do we re-create the democracy and revive the democracy in this institution?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that democracy, since 1990, in regard to how this Legislature operates has diminished, and I think that is wrong. That does not serve parliamentarians well, and it certainly doesn't serve the public well either. That has been done by

a succession of changes to the standing orders and practices around this place that have diminished the ability of members to do their jobs and of the public to be seen. If we continue in this direction, we're going to get more and more disconnect from the public when it comes to them interacting with politics in Ontario, and I think that's unfortunate.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: It's a pleasure to be able to speak on the speech from the throne today.

Before I begin, I would like to introduce my legislative intern, Melody Greaves, who is in the Speaker's gallery—I think the interns were just allowed to start coming into the Legislature. Melody did most of the work on the comments I'm about to make. Thank you, Melody.

I rise today to discuss some of the key points in the speech from the throne, which was delivered to the House earlier this fall. I want to focus primarily on our government's commitments to invest in and expand Ontario's long-term-care sector to better support our senior population.

Keeping Ontario's seniors safe and healthy through the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a major priority for the government. The pandemic has been extremely difficult for people living in long-term-care homes. Of course, we all know about the outbreaks of COVID-19 in some long-term-care homes and the tragedies that those caused. But even in homes where they managed to protect the residents from COVID-19, the individuals experienced significant isolation and loss of community because of the restrictions on visits and group activities. The pandemic exposed the long-standing vulnerabilities of the long-term-care sector caused by decades of underfunding. I'm proud that our government is making changes to improve long-term care.

The government has listened to the concerns of residents, families, advocates and those working in long-term care and is investing in several key areas in the sector.

First, the government is committed to investing \$2.68 billion to build and modernize long-term-care homes around the province by creating thousands of new bed spaces. This initiative could not come at a better time, as the wait-lists have reached an all-time high. The wait-list to access a long-term-care bed has been between 18,000 and 30,000 people since the 1990s but has reached a record high of 38,000 Ontarians as of June 2021. On average, these individuals on the provincial wait-list wait 163 days, or roughly five months, to be placed in a facility. The long wait-list is partially due to the fact that only 611 beds were built between 2011 and 2018 under the Liberals. The supply of beds and proper supports did not increase to reflect the growing demand across the province.

The long wait for a space in long-term care not only impacts those seniors on the wait-list and their families, but any Ontarian who requires hospital care. Just last week I was called by Natalie Bubela, the CEO of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare, because they hit a record number of what are called alternate-level-of-care patients, or ALC

patients. In the Bracebridge hospital, over 50% of the beds were occupied by ALC patients. So not having enough long-term-care beds certainly affects the hospitals and the work they do as well, including surgeries.

I'm pleased that our government is living up to our promise to invest in long-term-care services and build 30,000 new long-term-care beds. The government is already making progress on its ambitious goals. There are currently more than 20,000 new and 15,000 upgraded beds in development, representing more than 60% of the province's goal.

In my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka, Fairvern Nursing Home will be redeveloped and expanded. Fairvern currently has 76 beds, many of which are in ward rooms, but the existing old building will be replaced with a modern 160-bed home. The Fairvern board of directors and the community have been working towards building this new facility for a number of years. Ownership and management of Fairvern is in the process of being transferred to the district of Muskoka. The district council has already approved the site for the new Fairvern on property generously donated by Sanford Investment Corp., and draft site plans have been drawn up for consideration.

I want to take a moment to talk about the plans for the new Fairvern Nursing Home. The goal is to build a home for future generations, including strong infection prevention and control mechanisms, with new technology included at every opportunity. The home aims to enable independence of residents while providing a desirable work experience for staff. Finally, Fairvern aims to utilize a social model rather than a medical model. To achieve these goals, Fairvern will be using a small-home design that structures its rooms in small clusters, allowing for a less institutional feel and a focus on family, community and companionship.

I should just say, my first experience with the old Fairvern was attending events there and having a tour through with one of the volunteers, Vi Hipgrave. I can say that the volunteers and the spirit of Fairvern have always been very positive.

Overall, Fairvern aims to be as future-proof as possible, so the home can adapt over time to changing circumstances and reflect the growing needs of Parry Sound–Muskoka seniors. I think the new Fairvern can be an example to us of quality resident-centred care and planning.

I would like to thank the Fairvern board of directors, under the direction of the current chair, Dana Murdy, the district of Muskoka and the town of Huntsville for all their hard work on this project. This vital expansion will allow the home to care for more residents and hire more staff, providing much-needed support to our population while creating more jobs in the area.

As I said, the current Fairvern Nursing Home is an old building with many ward rooms, and it is certainly not the only one like that. Approximately 300 of the province's long-term-care homes are older and in need of redevelopment. That is why Ontario is now accepting applications both to build new and redevelop existing long-term-care homes.

For example, I know that an application has been submitted by Lakeland Long Term Care in Parry Sound, and I certainly want to be on the record as supporting that application to build more much-needed long-term-care beds in the Parry Sound area.

1450

I'd also like to take this time to bring something further to the attention of the House. In comparison to the provincial average, the median wait time for an individual who requires specific ethnocultural, linguistic or religious accommodations can be much longer. Admittedly, this isn't as big an issue in my area, but I know it is a challenge that some families face. In some cases, an individual may have to wait an additional six months or longer for placement in a long-term-care home that can properly accommodate their needs. Culturally sensitive care can be vital to successful, compassionate long-term care yet can sometimes get lost in our conversations about budgets and sector strain. As we plan to expand the long-term-care sector, ensuring that culturally specific options are available will help seniors communicate and connect with one another in ways that are meaningful to them while also providing better resident-centred care. For individuals with more complex needs, such as dementia or Alzheimer's disease, for example, this is all the more true. Allowing such individuals to age in an environment that is linguistically or religiously familiar to them will help them feel more at ease in their accommodations and provide much-needed peace of mind for their families.

In fact, my legislative intern, Melody Greaves, who helped prepare my notes for this speech and was introduced at the beginning of the speech, was telling me that her family is having trouble finding a long-term-care facility that can appropriately support an elderly relative who communicates predominantly in Italian.

Imagine being a senior living in a long-term-care home and trying to communicate your needs if the staff and other residents don't speak your first language. And then, for the 64% of long-term-care residents who have a diagnosis of dementia, not being able to communicate in their first language would make things even worse.

I trust the Ministry of Long-Term Care will take into account these needs as they assess the applications they are receiving.

In all, I am pleased that Ontario seniors will finally have better access and choice when it comes to long-term care. By building more beds and expanding facilities across the province, the wait-list will surely decrease. Individuals and their families can rest assured that more high-quality long-term-care beds will be available. This will also provide a boost to our economy, as new jobs will be created to both build and staff these new facilities.

On the subject of creating jobs and increasing staffing: The speech from the throne also highlights the government's investment of \$5 billion over four years to hire more than 27,000 staff, nurses and personal support workers. This is in support of the ultimate goal to increase the daily hours of direct care for each resident to four hours every day. This, too, is an area that has been neglected. Between 2009 and 2018, the average daily hours of care

increased by just 22 minutes from all providers. Our seniors deserve to have the care and attention they need to age comfortably, safely and with dignity. The government recognizes that residents need action now. Reaching the target of four hours of daily direct care per day will take time, but the government is already at work. By April 2022, the government is committed to adding 16,200 more personal support workers to the health care system, including in long-term-care facilities.

As part of the government's plan to start fixing the long-term-care sector now, Minister Phillips recently introduced legislation to improve the well-being of residents in long-term-care homes and retirement homes. If passed, Bill 37, the Providing More Care, Protecting Seniors, and Building More Beds Act, 2021, would take a vital first step towards providing the supports needed to accommodate the expanding sector. To achieve the goal of increasing the daily hours of care to four hours per resident per day by March 31, 2025, this bill contains specific steps to reach this ambitious goal.

The first step towards reaching this goal will be increasing the current average hours of care provided by allied health care professionals by 36 minutes per resident per day by March 31, 2023. As a result, slowly but surely, current residents in Ontario's long-term-care homes will finally be able to receive the support and the care they deserve. More daily care means that residents' rights will be better upheld, and infection prevention and control, plans of care, abuse and neglect, nutrition and hydration and medication management will all be improved. Since roughly 70,000 people live in 626 long-term-care homes across Ontario, this legislation would allow this large community of seniors to age more comfortably.

Increasing the hours of daily care provided means hiring more trained, qualified staff. The Minister of Colleges and Universities is working with our post-secondary institutions to provide competent nursing staff and personal support workers to supply this increased demand. The Ministry of Colleges and Universities has collaborated with institutions around the province to create programs to maintain the highest standards in nursing education and expand the options available to students. New four-year bachelor programs in nursing have been created at Georgian College and St. Lawrence College, in addition to the 37 baccalaureate nursing programs at other institutions.

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities and the Ministry of Long-Term Care also recently announced an investment of almost \$35 million to increase enrolment in nursing education programs across Ontario. In practice, this investment will result in an additional 1,130 nursing diploma students and 870 bachelor of science and nursing degree students for each semester intake.

Increasing enrolment in nursing education is a good step in the right direction to ensuring that Ontario's long-term-care sector has highly skilled, competent staff.

I heard on the weekend, when I was home in Parry Sound, a radio ad from Near North District School Board as well, advertising a personal support worker program that they're running.

The time for the province to act is now. By 2035, one quarter of the population will be over the age of 65. The demographics in our province are changing. We need to plan ahead to ensure everyone can access the supports they need. The government and the homes will need to work together to build our capacity for care. As Ontario's population ages, we need to be proactive and expand the long-term-care sector to accommodate the needs of our current senior population, as well as the needs for the future.

Locally, in my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka, 29.3% of the year-round population living in the area is over the age of 65, according to the 2016 Canadian census, and I suspect this year's census will show that that number has increased. Since seniors represent nearly one third of our local population, we need to be proactive to best support our population in the future.

I'm thankful to the government for investing over \$2.4 million into long-term-care homes in Parry Sound–Muskoka this year. This additional funding will allow homes to hire and retain more staff so they can increase the hours of care to each resident every day, in line with the provincial goals. And this is just the start of the increases to funding. By 2024-25, the six long-term-care home facilities in Parry Sound–Muskoka will receive an additional \$15 million to allow for four hours of direct care per day.

Importantly, I would like to take a moment to thank the staff and management of all the long-term-care homes in Parry Sound–Muskoka, who have done an exceptional job of managing the pandemic and protecting our seniors and vulnerable population. Our long-term-care homes have seen almost no cases of COVID-19 since the pandemic began, and to the best of my knowledge, these cases were limited to the staff members. In each of those cases, action was taken very quickly by the home to prevent further spread of the virus, which effectively helped protect other staff and the residents.

The speech from the throne made it clear that Ontario is dedicated to keeping people healthy. Even as multiple waves of the virus have threatened the safety of our most vulnerable populations, the government remains steadfast in its commitment to listen to science and protect people.

I would be remiss not to stress the importance of vaccinations to Ontario's plan to reopen. Getting vaccinated is truly the way out of this pandemic. Each dose administered brings us closer to ending the restrictions and lockdowns, and being able to convene with loved ones, travel, and return to normalcy in the future.

To those who have stepped forward and gotten vaccinated, we are all grateful for your commitment to progressing out of the pandemic.

In Ontario, of all individuals over the age of 11, roughly 89% have received one dose and 86% have received both doses.

To those who have been administering the vaccines for nearly year now, I sincerely thank you for your commitment to protecting the health and safety of all Ontarians.

1500

Since Ontario began the COVID-19 vaccination program, our health care workers have administered nearly 23 million doses in total, meaning more than 11 million people aged 12 and over have been fully vaccinated.

In particular, I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation to the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit and North Bay Parry Sound Health Unit for their roles in vaccinating our local population and protecting our most vulnerable people.

To anyone who has not yet done so, I strongly encourage getting both doses of the vaccine. I'd also like to encourage parents of young children to have their children vaccinated as well. Health Canada has recently announced the authorization of Pfizer pediatric formulation of the COVID-19 vaccine for children between the ages of five and 11.

I was pleased to see two of my grandchildren, Beatrice and Noelle—I got a photo sent to me showing that they've been vaccinated. They are six and eight years old, and I'm really pleased that they have taken that step to protect their family and friends and themselves.

In the Muskoka area, children aged five to 11 years have the highest COVID-19 case incident rate across all age groups as of mid-November, and that situation is not unique to Muskoka. The fourth wave has had a major impact on our children. Vaccinating young children will allow them to get back to learning and playing safely while contributing to the protection of the wider community.

As highlighted in the speech from the throne that opened this session of Parliament, the government is pursuing a cautious reopening of the province. We must not forget that the progress we have made in preventing the spread of this deadly virus is due in part to the cautious nature of Ontario's reopening. Now with the newest variant confirmed in the Ottawa area, we need to stick to that cautious approach to reopening.

In closing, I want to remind everyone across the province that we're all in this together. As we work to put the pandemic behind us, we are committed to protecting our vulnerable populations while investing to build a better Ontario for the future. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to the speech from the throne.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Your first question comes from the member from Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: It's nice to hear the member talk about his grandchildren getting vaccinated, and I can hear some emotion in his voice. I think that's a really wonderful thing. I'm also looking forward to being a grandfather some day.

I wanted to talk about the plan for long-term care. You're talking about getting the four hours of hands-on care, but you're going to need PSWs, personal support workers, in order to do that. The long-term-care staffing study from the Ministry of Long-Term Care found 40% of personal support workers leave the health care sector within one year of training and 25% of PSWs leave within two years. It also found that 60% of personal support

workers in long-term care are employed part-time. So if you are going to get to four hours of hands-on care, you're going to have to improve the retention and the working conditions of personal support workers in this province so people can actually make a career out of that field. How will this government actually—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Back to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka to answer the question.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for Spadina for that excellent question and for his comments about grandchildren getting vaccinated. Yes, I was very pleased to receive a text with pictures of Noelle and Beatrice being rewarded with candy. I'm not sure how else they bribed them, but I'm very pleased, obviously. You want to see them and their community protected.

The member makes some good points about PSWs. Obviously a huge challenge of meeting the goal of four hours of direct care is having all the health care workers, and I would agree that if you're running any business, it's in your interest to have the same employee stay around for as long as possible. The challenge of retention that was raised by the member is a valid one, and I think it's something that absolutely needs to be addressed.

As I mentioned in my speech, there are a number of initiatives to train more personal support workers, including the tuition costs being covered. The ad I heard on the Near North District School Board specifically mentioned that tuition was covered to train more personal support workers.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Forgive me. Please give me some indulgence. I have so much admiration and gratitude for the service that the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka has brought to this chamber over the past 20 years, a true champion for his community. I know he's accomplished a lot over the past 20 years in his community in so many different ways, working with governments of different stripes, working also with political leaders at different levels. I'm wondering if he could speak a little bit about some of the things that he's been able to accomplish over the past couple of years since this government came to office and which areas he's most proud of in that. I think it's important that we have that on the record, some of the amazing work that he's been able to do working with his colleagues on the government benches. Could you speak a little bit about that, sir?

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you, member from Niagara West, for that very open-ended question that allows me to talk about whatever I might wish to talk about.

It will be 21 years that I will have been here come next year, which is—it's gone by very quickly, I might say. But I think one of the great things about this job is that you really get to know your community probably better than in any other job, and we've all experienced that, I'm sure, especially in a riding like Parry Sound–Muskoka, which has 26 municipalities and seven First Nations and is quite diverse.

One of the things I'm proud about—of course, we all have private members' bills. I had one on paved shoulders that I debated at least twice in here, and the intent of it has effectively been done, so now when I drive back to the riding and I'm going along Highway 124, it's being paved right now. They're paving the shoulders, so I'm really pleased about that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Humber River–Black Creek.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: There's so much to say in terms of LTC. Since this government took office, the ratio of staff to residents in long-term care has actually diminished. With all the mistakes of the former government, it's actually even less now. Part of fixing the problem is to respect the PSWs, to pay them better, to make their job better for them, because they're struggling doing everything they can to take care of our loved ones.

One thing I wanted to point out was, if I remember correctly, one of the forecasts was to add 46 minutes of direct care in two years. The thing is, we needed four hours yesterday. So where is the sense of urgency in fixing this?

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member from Humber River–Black Creek for that question. I think there absolutely is a sense of urgency in just the hiring of, I believe, 27,000 new staff—personal support workers, nurses, registered practical nurses—and the upskilling. There's a big upskilling part that's going on as well. That's going to be a huge challenge.

I think that the timetable the government has set out is not going to be easy to accomplish. It's going to take a lot of work and training from every kind of institution we have, colleges—as I say, on the weekend I heard an ad from the Near North District School Board that's doing PSW. I think it's definitely urgent and it's going to be a challenge fulfilling the schedule that's been laid out getting four hours of care by 2025.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The Minister for Citizenship and Multiculturalism has a question.

Hon. Parm Gill: I want to thank my colleague for his very passionate speech and also want to thank him for the work he's done here on behalf of his constituents for many, many years.

He talked a bit about the vaccination rate and why it's so important. We all agree that the last 18 months or so have been very, very difficult for all Ontarians, especially businesses, and it's thanks to individuals, Ontarians stepping up to get their vaccination, that we're able to bring life to somewhat normal. We're nearing a 90% vaccination rate, first dose; the second is almost there as well. I'm wondering if the member can share with this House why it's important for us to continue to encourage the remaining 10% or 11% that need to get the vaccination. What sort of impact would that have on our province moving forward?

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you for the question from the member from Milton. I think vaccinations—that's our way out of this pandemic. I think the province has done really well. The rates you just talked about: 89% have a

single dose; I believe it's 86% that have two doses. Of course, kids five to 11, as I mentioned, now can get a vaccine. That is our way of getting back to as normal a world as we can. I think we're all sick and tired—I think everybody's sick and tired—of COVID, but that is the best thing we can all do to get back to as normal a life as possible, including for our businesses that have been locked down at times. This is the way that they can thrive again and do well and we can get back to growing the economy the way the government so much wants to.

1510

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you to the member. I always feel that we're kindred spirits. My son-in-law is from the Parry Sound area, and I also know that we enjoy a beautiful natural environment and incredible access to water and to all the good things that that brings.

The other, unfortunate thing is that I note we also are sharing the crisis in the opioid situation. Although I would argue that Thunder Bay is in a far worse place, Parry Sound is not in a good place as well. I note that there was some movement and some funding for a treatment facility, like a detox facility, in your riding. I was just wondering if you could comment on the importance of having that detox centre close to home.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you for that question from the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan—excellent question. Yes, you're correct in that particularly the Parry Sound part of my riding is, I would say, worse off than the Muskoka side. But we're fortunate that the minister sitting right in front of me, Minister Tibollo, did come up and visit the riding in August, I believe it was, and met with a bunch of the different folks involved from all across the riding. He did hear that there is very much a need for a facility in the riding. I believe some applications have been made and I'm hopeful that one will be approved so we do get a site in the riding itself. But it is a real challenge, particularly in the Parry Sound side of the riding, so thank you for raising that question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I hope you took him out fishing when he was up there.

Further debate?

Mr. Joel Harden: It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon to talk about the throne speech. A lot of things were said in the speech. A lot of things were said in the speech, a lot of great aspirations said in the speech, and I want to believe—every time I walk into this place, Speaker, I want to believe that we all come into this place with great aspirations. But as my grandparents used to tell me when I fell short of their expectations, sometimes aspirations aren't enough. In fact, I was raised in my grandparents' church, and I know some people here went to Sunday school. When I fell short of her aspirations, my grandmother would always quote Galatians 6:7 back to me. She would look me in the eye and she would say, "Joel, God is not mocked, for that which you sow is that that you will reap." A little bit of Sunday school this afternoon, Speaker. What I took to heart from that is that actions are

more important than words. Actions are more important than words.

So when I would tell my grandmother that I was done my homework and I wasn't, not a good call. When I would tell my grandmother that I'd cut the lawn and I hadn't, not a good call. So when this government in this speech tells the people of Ontario that they have pursued—and I'm going to quote from the speech verbatim—"the most cautious reopening in Canada," this does not meet the Galatians sniff test for me, because what I have seen and what the people of Ottawa Centre have seen is a government lurching from chaos moment to chaos moment during this pandemic.

There was a moment, and I remember it well because my phone blew up at the time, when unbeknownst to our city, checkpoints were set up at our bridges that connect us to our neighbours from Quebec. No one told the mayor of Ottawa. No one told the Ottawa police. No one told anybody in a planning capacity for emergency services in our city that this was going to happen, but it just happened. We were told summarily that playgrounds were going to be closed. And then we learned later through an investigative story from the Toronto Star that there was somehow a nine- to 10-hour cabinet meeting where folks were trying to persuade the Premier to open up too quickly. And what happened? What happened is that we had a massive spike.

So with all due respect to the Lieutenant Governor of this province, I have not seen the most cautious reopening in Canada here in Ontario. I think we've done better than other places, but I have seen something quite different.

I have seen it particularly for persons with disabilities, people who have had to live in grinding and humiliating poverty in this pandemic, because long before we've had this recent debate about inflation, the cost of living for persons with disabilities—who, more than others, have had to shelter at home and be careful—has massively gone up. But this government decided to claw back benefits, if they happened to qualify from the federal government. This government decided to only have a temporary bump-up for a few months for folks on the Ontario Disability Support Program, and then took it away. The pandemic didn't end. People's poverty didn't end, that we legislate here, but we took it away. I don't call that cautious. I would say, failing the Galatians test, this is a lack of ambition for what we did for the most vulnerable in this crisis.

My colleague from Thunder Bay–Atikokan a moment ago was talking about the opioid crisis and what it has done in this pandemic, the continued ravaging of people and families as we have watched people continue to suffer with a poisoned illicit drug supply in our city. Talk to any first responder anywhere in this province and they will tell you there are people unravelling before their eyes. We stand by and we watch and we debate whether or not we should have a safe supply in our cities. We debate whether or not we can work as hard for our neighbours who use drugs as we do for the nine million Canadians we gave the Canada emergency recovery benefit.

All of a sudden, we had an epiphany as a country. People had an intractable problem: They couldn't work.

We had a global pandemic, so we mobilized good will. I know my federal colleagues up in Ottawa pushed the Trudeau government really hard—really hard—and we got a \$2,000-a-month living income. We got a basic income pilot, Speaker. We got a basic income pilot because the people of Canada demanded it.

We have not had that for persons with disabilities. We've capped them out; we still cap them out. We haven't had that for our neighbours suffering with addictions and a mental health crisis. So I don't see a cautious reopening. What I see is the continuation of a very difficult and chaotic situation.

Speaker, this throne speech also referenced an incredible person—I hope I pronounce her surname right—Anita Quidangen, the first person vaccinated in Ontario, who is a personal support worker. It talked about the sacrifices and the hard work that Anita and her colleagues have done on the front line, and that's great. PSWs want to hear that.

But do you know what PSWs also want, Speaker? Full-time hours. Full-time hours, decent wages, travel compensated, benefits and sick pay: That's what PSWs and DSWs, developmental service workers, want, both of them. What have we seen in this government? This cautious reopening plan, where we have relied on PSWs who, as study after study, particularly, the armed forces report told us, saw some of the most heinous things we would not want anyone to see in a workplace. They saw it every day in the worst moments of this pandemic. What have we been doing to help PSWs improve their work?

Unfortunately—and I'm going to only assume that it's because it's the easy thing to do; it's the path of least resistance—we have worked with the infrastructure we have in this province, which is dominated, as we have said many times in this Legislature, by for-profit companies who have issued dividends to shareholders, who have issued great cheques to management executives, who employ, as I understand it, many previous top staffers in this government. They've gone straight from government into being lobbyists for the private, for-profit home care and long-term-care industries. As I described it when I was here last time for a full week, we keep pouring water into this leaky bucket that is the long-term-care and home care system where, depending on whose numbers you believe, we lose between 25% to 40% of public investment in unnecessary costs accrued by private, for-profit operators.

The people of Ontario are not allowed to see the truth. They're not allowed to see the disclosures that home care operators give to the Ministry of Health. We have asked for it time and time again. We don't get to know how much Bayshore creams off the top, or ParaMed or CarePartners. We aren't allowed to know. It's an absolute absurdity.

1520

I was on the doors this weekend and had occasion to talk to an older woman who has been in Canada many generations but whose home country is Denmark. She was talking to me about what home care work looks like in Denmark—how people are not only paid decent wages and how it's a very prestigious profession, but how their travel is compensated. They have to go into rural parts of

Denmark—a much smaller country than Canada; a smaller place than Ontario, even—and not only is their travel compensated, there are electric or hybrid vehicles available for those workers. Can you imagine, Speaker? Why not? I said to her that I once told the mayor of Ottawa—because the mayor often has these grand openings and events in our city, and you have the great spectacle of the colour guard for the first responder units, pipe bands and whatnot. I joked with the mayor, “Wouldn't it be great one day”—it wasn't a joke, really; it was a sincere statement—“if we had as part of the colour parade personal support workers and developmental service workers, so we celebrated that profession as much as we celebrate these other care workers and first responders?”

I think that's what we have to start thinking about. We would never say to a police officer or a firefighter or a paramedic, “We're going to let Bayshore pay you your salary and you're going to be paid 60%. You're not going to have full-time hours; you're going to have to string together your job between a few different workplaces. You're not going to be paid for travel, and you're not going to have sick days.” We would never say that to those prestigious first responder professions, but we say it all the time to personal support workers and developmental service workers.

Why I'm talking about personal support workers—and I hope members of the government will listen to this, because this is something newsworthy our office is working on this week that we would like to resolve on this week. I was contacted last week by students at Willis College. This is the private career college the government has partnered with to expedite them through a five-week course to train them to be PSWs. The hook to get into the profession—because we urgently need people in this profession. I've talked about the working conditions that we need improved, but let's just go to our point of agreement: We need people to get into this profession. We need renewal in this profession. So the students were promised, through Willis College, free tuition, free books and paid placements, and that their work placements would happen during their school hours: 9 to 4 or 9 to 5. A lot of people leapt at that. They thought, “Fantastic.” There were sign-ups for that.

But unlike across the Ottawa River, where I live, in Ottawa Centre—where the province of Quebec guaranteed every single person going through that program a wage of \$50,000 a year and regular hours and access to benefits and all those good things, what we did is, we worked through Willis College. Do you know what I'm starting to hear, Speaker, from a class of 26 students who contacted us last week? Their placements aren't paid. Willis College is asking them to go in in two shifts: either 7 to 3 or 3 to 11. A lot of this group of 26 are single moms, and they're saying to me, “Joel, where am I supposed to put my kid between 3 and 11? And I was counting on that to be paid.”

Making matters worse, this private career college working with the government to expedite people into training for this profession—they don't qualify for student assistance. They don't qualify for the Ontario Student

Assistance Program. Do you know what the head of student assistance told this group of students who were complaining about the lack of paid placements and what they were supposed to do for family and school life? They said, “Apply for Ontario Works”—social assistance. How is that offering respect? Social assistance, Ontario Works, is supposed to be there in cases of emergency—personal emergency, family emergency. It is not supposed to be the backstop for funding the next generation of care workers. What in heaven’s name is going on here?

I’m going to take a stab at it, and I hope the government can clear this up for me this week. I’m going to guess that they saw what was happening in Quebec, they saw what was happening in other countries, they wanted to jump on this train of training up people super fast, and they found a private career college partner. But clearly, what was being sold to those students has not been delivered, and somebody in the public service, at a high level in this government, has got some explaining to do.

It’s not fair or honest or decent to ask someone who is—it’s a calling to be a DSW or a PSW; you want to serve. To have them say, “I’m going to book off five weeks of my life,” and then put them into a position where you don’t deliver those paid placements, where you’re asking people to work hours when it’s hard to look after the kids—I talked to someone today from one of the synagogues back home. The synagogue is very active in helping sponsor many people who are newcomers to our country. One newcomer has two children and just found out that she’s booked for 3 to 11 p.m. next week. Making matters worse, she took one of her final exams and because of a language barrier that could have been accommodated—that is accommodated, I can tell you, in public post-secondary institutions—failed the test. But if she could articulate her views on medication or proper supports or identifying conditions of dementia or all these really, really important skills that PSWs and DSWs have, she would have passed with flying colours. So not only has this woman been put through hell for three weeks taking this exam, but now there’s a potential thought that she may not graduate after all the sacrifices.

In my speech about the speech from the throne—I’m telling you, you guys have got to get on top of this for Willis College in Ottawa. This is a gong show. This is a mess that would never be allowed to happen in public post-secondary institutions. Algonquin College, La Cité college in Ottawa run fantastic training programs for PSWs, top-rate. So why are we watching this private career college promise students one thing and deliver something else?

Speaker, in the last six minutes I have I want to move off the concerning and the negative, because I want to promote something that’s positive that I didn’t see in the throne speech.

I want to believe that in the last five and a half months we have in this Parliament, everybody in this place should be talking to people in Ontario about how they can make a better life for themselves and their families.

I am absolutely convinced, with decades of experience, that the best ticket to a good life is a union card. Helping

working people form unions should be a priority to this government. But what I didn’t see in their Bill 27 that we were debating earlier, Speaker—their newfound love from unions—are any measures that will make it easier for working people to join unions, because it is really hard.

I have been a union organizer. I have volunteered and worked hard as a member in my local union. It is not easy to form a union in the province of Ontario, particularly in the gig economy and precarious workplaces.

This government could, right now, allow for card-check certification that gives workers that private opportunity to express their confidence in a unionization drive without being terrorized by an employer. And if an employer refuses to grant a first contract to a newly organized union, they could make sure they had first-contract arbitration; they could do it today, and I haven’t seen it in their Working for Workers bill. But on a good note, Speaker, that is one of the first things an NDP government will do. We will make sure people can join unions. I’d like to think this is something that a socialist like myself and Conservatives over here can agree on. People should have the freedom and the choice; they should have the ability, without fear, to join and form unions. So much of what we have in this country has been given to us from grandmothers and grandfathers who took enormous risks—honestly, Speaker, it sounds like hyperbole but it isn’t—blood, sweat, and tears, to form unions in major cities in this country, in this province. We’ve lost it, particularly in the private sector, where it is so hard to form unions.

I want to take a minute to tip my hat to SEIU Local 2 back home, which organizes cleaners in the city of Ottawa and around this country. What they have done, by signing up thousands of front-line heroes—we don’t often talk about cleaners and heroes, but who is keeping our workplaces sanitary and safe? Who is keeping the airports sanitary and safe? Who is keeping the transit stations sanitary and safe? Cleaners are, Speaker.

Interjection: We should give them a big round of applause.

Mr. Joel Harden: Absolutely. Let’s give the cleaners a round of applause.

Applause.

Mr. Joel Harden: I’m thinking of my friend Winston. I haven’t been to the Ottawa airport in awhile, but the chair of the cleaners’ union at the airport is a friend of mine named Winston. I know the management at the Ottawa airport are afraid of Winston, and they should be, because he has the respect of his co-workers. If anything untoward happens on the floor, Winston knows about it. People will talk to him about it right away. There isn’t even a protracted grievance process at the Ottawa airport. The process is, “Talk to Winston; resolve the problem.” That’s the power you get with a union. When you have a union and when you have respected leadership like Winston and others, you can fix problems.

1530

I wanted to see that in the throne speech, Speaker. I wanted to see a province not only say, as the labour minister has been saying lately, “I pick a side, and I pick

workers”—great, wonderful. Help workers defend themselves. They don’t need ministers saying wonderful things. They need the ability to stand up, particularly to the big dot-com companies—the Amazons of the world, the Ubers of the world, the DoorDashes of the world—these billionaires who sit in their lofty estates in another country. They need a government that will make sure rules are fair for them to organize and get pensions and get benefits and get sick days. That’s what they need, and that’s what they will get next June, when the NDP is elected in this province and we start bringing the values that our grandmothers and grandfathers fought for into place.

A last note, Speaker—a slight tilt back to the slight negative: I can’t end talking about workers and organizing without remembering what happened to workers at the Sheraton hotel in Ottawa. Tourism, as we know, has been one of the toughest-hit industries in the province. Most hotels have taken this moment to tell their workforce, “You’re on furlough. You’re being laid off, but when the industry comes back, you’re going to be called back.” But the Sheraton hotel, owned by an offshore holding company, without notifying anybody—before tax season last year, when people were filing for their records of employment, they found they were terminated overnight. No one told them. They found out themselves. They didn’t notify the union in the workplace. So they contacted us, and we raised a ruckus. We got them in the press. I asked the minister responsible, the Minister of Tourism, the MPP from Nepean, “Will you show up and will you talk to the workers?” She never showed up. “Will you do what you can to pressure this holding company?” She never showed up.

So you can talk about how you love workers all you want, you can surround yourself with buddies you’ve made from the labour movement, but do you know what workers will never forget? They will never forget if you were silent when they were being bullied by their employer. I was proud to be there with Andrea Horwath. I was proud to be there with members from the labour movement in Ottawa. This part of the NDP comes from the labour movement, and we will never, ever forget that.

We are going to make a better province next June, and it’s going to start with making workers the priority.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Your first question comes from somebody over here: the member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Wow, what can you say about that? You’re absolutely right: The best way is to be unionized.

But do you know what’s interesting? Our members are unionized. A constituent in my office belongs to COPE. If you work at Queen’s Park, you belong to OPSEU. Do you know who doesn’t have one unionized worker working for them? The PC Party. As you say, you’re worker-friendly, you’re bringing bills in—“working for workers.” Then why aren’t your staff unionized, being paid real wages, real benefits and pensions, like they are with the NDP?

So I’m really glad you raised that issue.

The other issue that I’ve got to ask about—I don’t know how long I get; he’ll tell me—is affordability. There’s

nothing here to talk about the cost of housing and rents. There’s nothing here to help with child care. There’s nothing here to help casino workers in Niagara or in Windsor or in Sarnia, anywhere. And I’ve got to ask you the question—there’s nothing on hydro bills, nothing on auto insurance, nothing on lowering gas. I’ve got to ask—

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

I guess you’ve taken enough from that to know where to go. Back to the member from Ottawa Centre to respond.

Mr. Joel Harden: I would say simply to my friend from Niagara Falls: It’s because my friends over here are failing the Galatians test. We’re not fooled, because that which you sow is that which you shall reap, so if you don’t actually bring in ambitious policy to make people’s lives more affordable—we’ve been calling for dental care for everyone. We’ve been calling for—we called for it today, my friend—a rent-control regime. They voted against it. Bill 23—they voted against it. We’ve been calling for pharmacare. My friend from London West has been calling for rights for gig workers. They vote against it time and again. So we don’t believe the rhetoric. We want to pull them into being in a better place. But folks at home shouldn’t be fooled. This is a sales job, and they deserve better.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the member opposite for his participation. I really appreciated his Sunday school lesson, and I appreciate where the member is coming from.

One of the things that the NDP, of course, have always struggled with is understanding how to pay for the various things that come forward when it comes to government spending. It’s why we saw the bond markets refuse the former Premier raising attempts to buy more bonds and to go deeper into debt. I think that might be a little bit referencing Romans 13:8: “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another.”

I’m just wondering if the member opposite would agree with the sentiment of ensuring good fiscal prudence as our province moves forward so that we can deal with disasters such as the pandemic as they come forward, and if he supports the Liberals when they were in power spending so that we have had to make sure that the fiscal firepower we have—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Back to member from Ottawa Centre to respond.

Mr. Joel Harden: I know my friend from Niagara and I share a love of scripture. I have to say, there was a socialist carpenter thousands of years ago who had a big problem with the notion that a focus on debt and letting bondholders run our country is the direction that we should go.

This is what I’ve heard: I’ve heard this government talk about highway plans that very few people want, investing billions of dollars—I think the number is \$10 billion, colleagues; am I right?—

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Yes.

Mr. Joel Harden:—while we have long-term-care homes and we have schools and hospitals that desperately need funding.

Do not be deceived, because that which you sow is that which you shall reap. We are reaping the dividend of massive underfunding from the Liberals. You've, sadly, continued that. You're not ambitious enough.

So how are we going to pay for things? We're not going to be spending money on concrete, my friend. We're going to be spending money on making this province a much better place.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for London West has a question.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to congratulate my colleague the member for Ottawa Centre on his remarks.

He talked about the students who are attending Willis College for the accelerated PSW training and who are being told that they're on their own during their placement.

I wondered if the member would like to share some of his thoughts about what would be a meaningful way to recruit and retain PSWs in Ontario.

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank the member from London West, because she gives me the chance to give a shout-out to the leader who approached me in the first place. Her name is Tiffany Taylor, and she's one of those students. What I see in Tiffany's remarks is an experience of falling into a gap with a private career college that has not done its due diligence and perhaps—we'll find out under investigation—has falsely marketed a program to students and left them in the lurch.

So what should we do? I think the post-secondary officials of this province have to figure out what's going on here and have to make sure these students get what they were told they would get—and that includes paid placements, placements that happen within school hours so they can manage their family affairs and their children—and that we get people urgently into this profession but we don't take advantage of them as we do so.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: To the member from Ottawa Centre: It's always a pleasure to listen to you in the Legislature. I appreciate that.

I guess the one point I would get across to start out is that I'd be careful of your language. I think it's important to heighten the level of conversation in the Legislature, and I think one gets the impression that you almost demonize business. I think we have to remember here in this House that businesses and unions are led by people, and there are good union leaders and there are bad ones, and there are good business people and there are bad ones. Let's just remember that so that we don't demonize any particular sector.

Having said that, I think the opposition may be somewhat concerned about organized labour really being quite excited by some of the legislation we're putting through. I think there are worries; I start to see the worries

over there. Joe Mancinelli from LIUNA is excited about what we're doing for newcomers with credentials.

What are your thoughts on what we're doing—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Let's go back to the member from Ottawa Centre for a response.

Mr. Joel Harden: I take the point about the dehumanization. I'll think of that when I hold forth in this place going forward. The Lebanese part of my family are all business owners, and I have nothing but respect for them.

What I will say is this: I was a professor at Nipissing University at one point, in North Bay, and we were told, "If you want a doctor in North Bay, hail a cab in Toronto." That's how bad it was. People couldn't find access to family doctors, and we've held people back. And that's just one occupation.

1540

So any move towards recognizing international credentials and doing it seriously—and you've opted out health care; I'm sure you noticed, my friend. We've got to fix that, because there are a lot of people who could be helping, particularly my friends from up north. There are a lot of people who could be helping if we empowered them with the ability to do so. So I take your point.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: I really enjoyed your speech today.

You mentioned quite a bit about long-term care—and 60% of PSWs in long-term care are employed part-time, 41% of registered nurses are employed part-time in long-term-care homes, and 45% of registered practical nurses are employed part-time. There's a 40% turnover rate with PSWs. In the first year, they leave the profession because of the low wages, the hard working conditions—and through the pandemic, the dangerous working conditions.

I also recall in this Legislature someone talking about a PSW living in a shelter because they did not make enough money for housing.

What would an NDP government do to raise the working and living conditions of PSWs so that we could actually get to a goal of four hours of hands-on care?

Mr. Joel Harden: I really appreciate that question, because that anecdote you mentioned, my friend from Spadina-Fort York, was an Ottawa anecdote. There were Ottawa-based PSWs living in a shelter in the city, and that was something that came to light thanks to Elizabeth Payne from the Ottawa Citizen.

That's why I worked with the member for London North Centre, the member for University-Rosedale and the member for Parkdale-High Park to put forward the Rent Stabilization Act, which the government voted against, unfortunately. I don't know why you said no to that. Most landlords I talk to want to be decent citizens. They want to make sure that people can have an affordable place to live. Yes, they need a margin to keep the place working, for sure, but they don't need 200% or 150%.

I was working, my friend, with a woman in the west end of the riding last week who has been fighting to stay in her unit as the landlord has been pushing out other tenants.

The rents have gone from \$1,400 to \$2,600 a month, and from \$1,300 to \$2,100 a month.

We have to be active and vigilant when people push and hurt tenants this way. That's why I take your point. If we want to make life more affordable, we need new rent control.

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

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: It's an honour for me to rise this afternoon in the House to reply to the speech from the throne and explain how our government has been protecting Ontario's progress in the fight against COVID-19, especially when it comes to addressing the mental health and addiction challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the last 20 months, Ontarians have had to adapt to many challenges and unpredictable situations that many of us have never experienced before. Without a doubt, this pandemic has truly tested our collective resilience. We've seen just how much the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on Ontarians across the province, but especially when it comes to their mental health. We have repeatedly seen research and data about increased levels of anxiety, depression, problematic substance use, and other mental health issues.

Speaker, I'm sure many of us have been aware, either by listening to our constituents or through media reports, of the damaging impact the pandemic has had on the mental health and well-being of the people everywhere in this province.

In Ontario, for example, the survey released by the Canadian Mental Health Association in March 2021 found that 36% of individuals say they're experiencing very high or high stress, up from 30% last summer; 35% report very high or high anxiety levels, up from 30% last summer; 17% say they're always or often depressed, up 13% from May 2020; and more than a quarter of Ontarians, 27%, are using more substances to cope, and that's up 21% from last summer.

At the peak of the initial wave, Kids Help Phone reported three times the number of children and youth who were calling or texting Kids Help Phone than prior to the pandemic.

I've been very concerned about these impacts, but I'm also very proud that our government acted so quickly to respond to the challenges forced on us by this pandemic.

And I'm really proud that a key part of our government's pandemic response was to make significant investments in mental health and addiction services and supports so that Ontarians of all ages, in every corner of the province, could be fully supported. This included providing up to \$194 million in emergency funding to expand and enhance many publicly available mental health and addictions services. This funding enabled the expansion of several virtual supports that have been accessed by more than 111,000 Ontarians since the start of this pandemic, with many more Ontarians continuing to seek the help they need during these difficult times.

Our government was also proud to launch an extremely innovative and evidence-based Internet-based cognitive

behavioural therapy program during the pandemic, which has been accessed now by over 70,000 individuals, including 6,100 front-line health care workers. I'm also especially proud to state here in the House today that this emergency funding helped 98% of Ontario's publicly funded mental health organizations remain open to support their clients during the pandemic.

I also want to take also a moment to thank our front-line mental health and addictions workers across the province. Every single day during this pandemic, they've gone above and beyond to support the mental wellness of so many Ontarians. I've been so proud to meet many of these incredible men and women in every corner of the province. The many long days and sleepless nights they've had to endure in some of the most difficult situations will never be forgotten. Their important work has saved so many lives, and they are truly heroes.

That's why, Mr. Speaker, we took decisive action to further protect our progress by recently announcing an investment of an additional \$12.4 million to ensure continued access to existing and expanded mental health supports for all of Ontario's front-line health care workers. This funding means that all of our health care heroes can now access self-referral and intake services, employer and employee resources, weekly online peer discussion groups, and access to effective and confidential supports from a clinician.

This funding will also be providing more workplace mental health training for leadership, management, front-line health care workers and non-clinical staff that will provide workplaces with the tools to foster mental wellness. This funding also means our health care heroes now have access to clinical psychologists specializing in trauma, mood and anxiety disorders and other psychological conditions through the COVID-19 psychological support program. I want to thank our partners in this initiative for their ongoing efforts to offer our health care heroes effective mental health care.

I also need to mention that this pandemic has been particularly difficult on our children and their parents. I've had many conversations and have received and sent correspondence to families whose children have been impacted by this terrible pandemic.

Earlier this year, I was proud to announce that our government has invested over \$31 million to help improve access to specialized mental health treatment services, reduce wait-lists and wait times, and support the mental health and well-being of children and youth by addressing the increased demand for services during the pandemic. This was a critical investment to ensure children and youth and their families have access to the supports they need to stay mentally healthy during these challenging times. This was one of the largest investments of its kind into the child and youth mental health sector in our province's history. It has helped to stabilize and expand existing services, while providing targeted investments and specialized mental health supports to help improve access to innovative solutions to support the mental health and well-being of our children and youth. Mr. Speaker, Ontario's

children and youth clients need to receive in a timely manner the appropriate care in the right settings, so I'm especially pleased with this particular announcement. However, we know we need to do more.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, hospitals across the province have seen a surge in severe eating disorders among children and youth due to increased isolation, school disruption, social media exposure, and stress-fueled unhealthy eating and exercise habits. That's why, through our Build Ontario plan, we announced another \$8.1 million to address increased demand for services to support specialized care for children and youth with eating disorders. In addition, Mr. Speaker, through our Roadmap to Wellness, we're investing \$11 million for eating disorder services and supports that span the continuum of care, from intensive services through to community, outpatient and early intervention services.

Our children and youth deserve to be fully supported, not only when it comes to their physical health, but their mental health as well. I'm proud to stand here knowing that our government is taking this issue very seriously and will continue to make the necessary investments to fully support the mental wellness of our children and youth.

1550

Mr. Speaker, we also recognize that in addition to the children and youth, Ontarians in rural, remote and northern communities across the province have also faced unique challenges with their mental health. As I've stated in the Legislature many times before, no matter where you live in the province, it has always been our mission that all Ontarians have access to high-quality mental health and addictions supports when and where they need them. From the very beginning, our government has taken decisive action to address the mental health and addictions needs in northern Ontario, rural and remote communities. We've made unprecedented investments totalling over \$40 million in new, ongoing annualized funding specifically to address the needs of those living with mental health and addictions challenges in northern Ontario. This funding includes new annual funding to address urgent gaps in care and extensive wait times for services in northwestern Ontario. We've made significant investments in Ontario's northwest, including Thunder Bay, such as \$1 million in additional annual funding to develop a system-wide response to the complex mental health and addictions challenges in the region, especially for children and youth.

We're making it easier for people to find and access support where and when they need it.

We often hear the parties opposite us talk about how we cut funding to mental health care, but this couldn't be further from the truth. I'm proud to stand here to say that our government has invested over half a billion dollars in net new annualized funding for mental health and addictions this year alone. It was through this funding that we announced the historic investment of \$32.7 million in new annual funding for targeted addictions services and supports across the province, including treatment for opioid addictions. These investments span the entire province but will have a profound impact on communities in northern Ontario.

We've also invested up to \$4 million to launch four new mobile mental health and addictions services across the province. I was recently proud to stand with my colleague from Peterborough–Kawartha to announce a new mobile clinic in Peterborough. And just a few weeks ago, I stood with the members for Haldimand–Norfolk and Niagara West to announce a new mobile clinic to serve rural communities in the Haldimand county and Niagara regions. These mobile mental health and addictions clinics will help to protect Ontarians' progress in the fight against COVID-19 by addressing the increased demand for mental health supports and services during the pandemic. These highly innovative clinics operate by bringing services via a clinical team that will travel to the communities that need them, while reducing the need for people to travel to find services. This is a critical investment, especially for those living in rural and remote communities that have identified gaps in mental health and addictions services. We've heard time and time again that more help is needed to support the mental wellness of Ontarians in rural communities, and we'll also soon be using these clinics to serve communities in the north. I look forward to sharing more details of these investments in the coming weeks.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also mention that a key component of the future of mental health and addictions care is, importantly, that we build more inclusive spaces. It is about establishing a more patient-centred system of care that can be better able to meet the diverse needs of the diverse populations that make up this province. This is an important priority for our government, as we move forward with building a more comprehensive and connected mental health and addictions system that works for all Ontarians. This is also reflected in where we are in making additional investments in mental health and addictions services.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to listen to and to work closely with Indigenous communities and leaders, as well, to collaborate on the mental health and addictions services that meet the needs of Indigenous people and are culturally appropriate. That is a priority for us. Indigenous peoples in Ontario and across Canada have faced long-standing barriers to accessing effective and culturally safe mental health and addictions care. So it is critical to make investments, such as the more than \$36 million we recently announced in community-led mental health and addictions supports in Indigenous communities across the province. This funding will help ensure culturally appropriate and trauma-informed supports are readily available for Indian residential school survivors and their families, as well as Indigenous-led student, youth and gender-focused services. And it will immediately expand and enhance culturally safe and appropriate mental health and addictions services for Indigenous peoples, families and communities throughout the province. To do this, we're providing more than \$16 million devoted to cross-government investments in Indigenous services. This includes funding for culturally adapted child and youth mental health services, including wellness supports for students, Indigenous-specific victim healing services,

and development of an Indigenous-driven opioid strategy to address the increase in opioid use and opioid-related deaths.

I am also incredibly proud of our most recent investment, \$2.9 million, to enhance and expand the Substance Abuse Program for African Canadian and Caribbean Youth, also known as SAPACCY, at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. These services will see seven new satellite locations open across the province. Just this past Friday, I was proud to stand with the members from Scarborough North and Scarborough–Rouge Park to announce this critical funding. This funding will enhance current program levels and expand services through the creation of new community satellite locations in Hamilton, Ottawa and Windsor. Additional satellite locations that we have previously announced are in Etobicoke, Peel, Scarborough and North York. This investment will support the recruitment of counsellors, therapists, case managers, outreach workers, and site coordinators, as appropriate. This funding will establish a network of culturally appropriate mental health services for Black youth across this province. This is the first of its kind, Mr. Speaker—and I'm very proud to stand today and speak about it—in the province of Ontario, perhaps in all of Canada.

Since day one, mental health and addictions has been a top priority for our government, and especially for me, as the minister responsible for mental health and addictions. While there have been long-standing challenges in Ontario's mental health and addictions system, long before COVID-19 saw us having to deal with additional issues, we've worked very hard to make progress in addressing extensive wait times and urgent gaps in care, and to increase access to new and innovative services.

Our government has allocated an increase of more than half a billion dollars in new annualized funding for mental health and addictions supports since the release of the Roadmap to Wellness. Through the Roadmap to Wellness, our plan to build a connected and comprehensive mental health and addictions system is something that we have seen as being the clear path forward for Ontario in making meaningful improvements to mental health and addictions care for people of the province. And it's being enabled by a \$3.8-billion investment over 10 years to expand mental health and addictions services. Through the road map, we are continuing to transform the mental health and addictions system into one that is more accessible, evidence-based and client-centred, while continuing to quickly respond to needs arising from the pandemic.

The support of our government has been seen where we have invested and provided, during the last 20 months, substantial amounts of money to provide safe alternatives to in-person care, when necessary, through the Internet-based services.

Mr. Speaker, we know the needs of the pandemic will be long-reaching. Our ongoing response to the mental health and addictions needs of all Ontarians, which have only been exacerbated as a result of the pandemic—but we will work through the Roadmap to Wellness and ensure that the benefits of creating a coherent, consistent system for all the people of Ontario continue to be built.

I look forward to continuing this important work and working with the centre of excellence, stakeholders, Indigenous partners and other people with lived experience as we continue to strengthen our system.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure many Ontarians and many of my colleagues here at Queen's Park will agree that mental health is clearly one of the most pressing health issues in our province and of our time. Data has shown that half the population here in Ontario will have or have had a mental illness by the age of 40. And we know that over a million Ontarians experience a mental health or addictions challenge each year.

1600

We know that our society has often stigmatized those living with mental health and addictions challenges, but thankfully, we're seeing some important changes and progress as a result of this pandemic. Many mental health and addictions sector workers have shown to be proven leaders and advocates in breaking down the stigma. We're seeing important progress in how we approach and treat mental health and addictions, and many front-line workers in the mental health and addictions sector are playing a critical role in delivering real and meaningful change. I am committed to working with mental health leaders, providers and people with lived experience as we continue our important work to transform our mental health and addictions system in our province.

Our government is committed to continue working collaboratively with our partners to ensure we provide the appropriate, client-centred services and supports that meet people's specific needs. And I say this perhaps too often, but I'm going to say it again because I believe everyone in Ontario understands this: You can't have health without mental health. You simply can't have one without the other.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Your first question comes from the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you to the member for his comments. I would be remiss if I did not bring to light that even though there's an announced investment in mental health, we are in a crisis in northwestern Ontario. Our suicide rates in youth in our isolated communities is something that we should all be very concerned with in this House—young lives that are just gone because there aren't the services. There aren't the clinicians, there aren't the people that are actually able to provide that. Last year, just before the pandemic, actually, we had families speaking to me about having to send their very young children away for years.

My question is, when will there be a sense of urgency given to this matter?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you to the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan for that question. There is a sense of urgency. You know, when we first came to government, one of the first things that we talked about was the fact that we have a pandemic with the polysubstance overdoses that were happening in and around the province of Ontario. The pandemic exacerbated that situation. We

moved very quickly. We put in place a Roadmap to Wellness that looks at the continuum of care which is necessary if one is to address the issues that relate to mental health and addictions.

We looked and we travelled the province. I've been to Thunder Bay maybe four times now. I've been as far north as Fort Albany and Pikangikum and Sandy Lake, and visited many of the First Nations, as well as the Akwesasne and all over Windsor. We are taking this very seriously. But to build the continuum of care requires understanding what the needs are and delivering those, and a half a billion dollars is the investment to date.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the minister for his comments. I'd like to thank the minister for, first of all, meeting with the groups from my riding. I think initially he met via AMO and promised to follow up with a longer meeting. Then, very shortly thereafter, he came to Port Carling and had a good meeting with representatives and Parry Sound and Muskoka, and then went up to Shawanaga First Nation and spent a few hours at Shawanaga First Nation meeting with Chief Adam Pawis. So I've seen him working first-hand to really get an understanding of the issues out there, and I would like to commend him for that.

He talked in his speech about patient-centred mental health and addictions. I wonder if he might enlighten us more about his philosophy to do with that.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you for that question. We actually, today, spent over an hour in discussions with AMO with the different members of the health units from around the province. One of the things we all agreed on is that the continuum of care is a necessary part of how we respond to the poly-substance situation we have now, the overdose situation we have. The centre of excellence is how we are building our continuum of care, how we're building our Roadmap to Wellness to ensure that we have the highest quality of services delivered in a way that's appropriate for the places where the services are needed. A one-size-fits-all solution does not work in the province of Ontario. It didn't in the past. It will not in the future. And to continue going along the same route without looking at the information, we were going to repeat the mistakes of the past and never resolve the problems.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much to the member. I'd just like to point out that under your government the debt has ballooned to over \$400 billion. That amounts to about \$27,000 for every Ontarian. This government is spending big, but you're not spending it on the services people need. And with all due respect, your government is cutting vital services. The FAO report today said that you've underspent in education by almost three quarters of a billion dollars, and over half a billion dollars is being underspent in public health. That's a lot of money that's being cut from vital services.

At the same time, the same document shows that you are spending almost \$11 billion—can I say it again?—\$11 billion on a concrete highway, a Highway 413 that nobody wants. Not one inch of that concrete will go to help the

people who are suffering from addictions and from mental health. So my question is, why would this government spend \$11 billion on highways when they're cutting vital services to the people who need them?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: I have to stop for a moment and think about this, the \$3.8 billion, the largest investment in the history not only of this province, probably in all of Canada, as an investment in mental health and addictions. And I am being told by someone from a previous government, your previous government, who cut over 5,000 beds, and a 13% cut in mental health spending—you want to give me a lesson on what the investments need to be when it comes to mental health and addictions? I'm more than happy to describe to you in detail the importance of building the continuum of care and the work that's being done by our ministry and by our government, which I am proud to stand with, because it is making investments and making a difference in people's lives in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Speaker, I want to thank the minister for the presentation. Certainly, when the pandemic started, our government made a commitment to the people of Ontario that we would do whatever it takes to be able to protect them, and certainly, through the work of the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and the Minister of Health, they've demonstrated that. We saw that through public accounts, which showed that our government has spent more on health care than any government in history, including in mental health, as the minister just alluded to.

But I want to ask him a specific question about the Roadmap to Wellness. Through the work of yourself and, of course, the Minister of Health—and I've had the pleasure of taking part in some of your round tables, as you've done many to be able to talk to Ontarians. So Minister, like many Ontarians, constituents in my riding are concerned about the impacts COVID-19 is having on Ontarians, including our children. I'm wondering if you can give us an update on the status of the Roadmap to Wellness here in the province.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you for the question. Again, the Roadmap to Wellness is a foundational document. The basis of its implementation is the investment of the \$3.8 billion over 10 years. This year we've achieved spending of \$525 million annualized, and we're looking at the lifespan of individuals and ensuring that there are services that are age-appropriate. We're ensuring that we build a stepped care model that is consistent throughout the province of Ontario, so no matter where you are, you will receive services. That's part of the mobile health units and some of the other innovations we're bringing forward.

The most important part, though, is the culturally sensitive component of the plan. That's to ensure that services are delivered to individuals in a way that's appropriate for them so [*inaudible*] can be built. That's why we're so proud to be working with Indigenous, francophone, LGBTQ, Black and other members of our community to ensure we have the appropriate plan in place.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Algoma–Manitoulin has the next question.

1610

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'm happy the minister is here and spent quite a bit of time talking about mental health. He and I have often had some sidebars and discussions about mental health. I do know that the minister will make sure that every single penny that is going towards mental health is actually being spent in mental health, and it won't be underspent.

What I want to talk to him about is in northern Ontario—I always try to bring that lens here—we do have some centres. We always need more. What we don't have is the continuum of care that he talks about. That's what's missing. When you're looking at a puzzle, you're looking at a frame, and every link is so important. We do not have that in northern Ontario. People have to travel great distances in order to get that. We don't have the aftercare; we don't have the support programs; we don't have the outreach; we don't have the avoiding relapse pitfalls; we don't have family skills; we don't have social skills programs that are there. Those are needed in northern Ontario, not in southern Ontario. Will you get them there?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you for that question. I appreciate it, because I do appreciate the need to build continuums of care within the areas where the individuals need the services and not moving individuals. There are studies that indicate to us you lower recidivism rates by providing services as close as possible to home. These are the reasons why I've travelled the province and spent as much time as I have in Thunder Bay and many other cities. I was on a call with AMO today, where I had the mayor of Sioux Lookout, the CAO of Thunder Bay—and we discussed those very issues.

We're working towards that. Rome wasn't built in a day. We are working towards that.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: It's a pleasure to rise and speak about the throne speech. Speaker, there are three things I'm going to talk about today, and the first is actually directly from the speech from the throne, which talked about special people in our community, ordinary citizens who have been stepping forward through this pandemic to support their community. I'm going to talk about four very special people.

Secondly, and just by coincidence, I plan to talk about children's mental health in my community. There's going to be, I think, some discrepancy between what we heard from the minister and what I've seen actually taking place on the ground. I will say that I know the minister will be familiar with Pathstone, because he was there earlier in the term, along with my colleague from Niagara West, for a visit. I'm going to talk a little bit about mental health and what front-line workers are actually telling me about what's going on on the ground.

If I have a little time left, I'd like to talk about the not-for-profit sector, which is the sector that I come from, and the shocking level of core program spending, similar to

mental health, that's actually coming from charitable dollars and not from the government, and the huge competition out there right now for charitable dollars, which is not going to things like expanding programs, seed money for new programs, things that charitable donations should go for, but rather is really being spent on core programming. It's a very, very troubling trend.

First of all, I want to talk about something that was actually mentioned in the throne speech, which was the contribution of individuals in our community. Speaker, I had the real honour on this past Saturday of giving an award, an annual award called the Community Advocate Award in my riding of Niagara Centre, to four very special people. This award is given to outstanding community members who made a positive impact on our community. I know everyone in this House has those special people in their communities. The recipients were nominated by friends, family and people across Niagara Centre who they have helped.

It was my distinct honour to give an award to Natasha Bell, who is the founder of the Black Owned 905 movement that's been successfully uplifting and promoting local Black-owned businesses. She's harnessed the power of social media by sharing local Black-owned businesses in the Niagara region to over 7,000 followers in the Niagara region, across various online platforms. Recently, she hosted a holiday BIPOC market in St. Catharines with over 30 vendors. Now, more than ever, we need to support local businesses in Niagara, and especially as they grapple with the impacts of the pandemic and begin the long road to recovery.

Nominators described Bell as a kind, caring, compassionate person always going above and beyond for her community and loved ones, and someone who is contributing to the greater good of our community. In recent interviews, Natasha said that she wants to expand her reach and plans to provide business plan support, taxation support, and business registration support to Black-owned businesses in Niagara. So it was a real pleasure to present her with an award and get to know her on Saturday.

Speaker, on Saturday, I had the pleasure of presenting an award to Anisha O'Brien. Like many students, Anisha O'Brien, in March of 2020, went from learning in a classroom to learning online. However, as we were all learning to navigate this new world, Anisha wanted to do more and help others. She's only 12 years old, Speaker. After each long day of online learning, she would spend several hours learning to crochet, and she made over 100 scarves. She donated those scarves to the Hope Centre in Welland to help those who are unhoused.

Her nominators described her as "a little girl with a big heart who is always thinking of others before herself. Anisha believes in her community and wants to make a difference in people's lives."

This year, she's crocheting rainbow blankets for the Hope Centre and other charities, and thanks to Anisha and her tireless work, she's helped hundreds in our community stay warm during the winter months. Anisha was adopted from China to a loving family in Welland, and she's doing

incredibly in school. She's doing so well that she's putting all this time into helping others. So I really congratulate her on that great work.

Speaker, I also had an opportunity to present an award to Annie Mazmanian, whom I've spoken about here in this House in members' statements. Annie has been a tireless advocate for nurses and front-line health care workers throughout this pandemic, sharing her experience and drawing attention to the urgent need for there to be greater mental health supports in place.

Earlier this year, she wrote a powerful piece in a local paper entitled "Don't Call Me a Hero" in which she said, "We need people to listen to us, particularly politicians. We are the ones at the bedside, 24 hours a day, so we know what we are talking about. We need to have more staff, more active leadership, and we need the government to get to the root of the problem in the health care system, not slap a Band-Aid on it. It's like surgery, that has to begin from the inside...."

"I don't want to just be called a hero. I want real change to happen."

Annie's nominators described her as "persistent and resilient in advocating for the mental health of her co-workers in the ICU and" the emergency department "at St. Catharines general hospital throughout the pandemic." I want to thank her for her tremendous work.

And, Speaker, I had the honour of presenting an award also to Doug Rapelje. Doug has been advocating for seniors his entire life. He started when he was in his twenties after hearing about the terrible conditions in the county home for the aged in Welland. Within a few years, he'd be running a 350-bed seniors home. Mr. Rapelje who is—well, I'm not going to say how old he is, but he looks really well for his age; let's put it that way. Listen to the things he's involved in: He's a member of the leadership council, Age-Friendly Niagara Network; a strong advocate for hospice services in Welland; the current vice-chair of the Welland Senior Citizens Advisory Committee; an honorary co-chair of the Touching Lives Campaign, which is an initiative to build a new multi-million-dollar long-term-care home for Foyer Richelieu, which is a French-speaking not-for-profit long-term-care home in my riding; and he was influential in having the city of Welland officially classified as an age-friendly city by the World Health Organization—just an incredible man, an incredible senior. I want to thank him for his incredible lifelong advocacy in fighting to ensure that seniors are treated with dignity and respect.

It was a real honour to present those advocacy awards to those four individuals over the weekend, and I think that's in keeping with comments in the throne speech that I think we can all agree on, which is that we should celebrate these incredible people in our communities.

Next, Speaker, I want to talk about mental health. We just heard from the minister for 20 minutes, who spoke a lot about mental health. What I find in our community is a lot different than what we've heard.

I appreciate that this government has stepped up much more than the last government in terms of funding mental

health, but as I heard my friend from Hamilton pointing out, that commitment was over a long period of time, and so talking about long-term commitments and making sure that appropriate monies get into our ridings and actually help people are two very different things.

1620

There's no question that in my riding and in the Niagara region, mental health services are underfunded. We know this because core services, as I mentioned, are dependent on charity to meet basic mental health needs. Kids in Niagara are waiting for mental health services, and they shouldn't be.

It should come as no surprise that the mental health of each and every one of us has been challenged at points throughout the pandemic.

The primary provider of children's mental health services in Niagara, Pathstone Mental Health, tells us that cases of anxiety, depression and self-harm at Pathstone have never been as high as they are right now.

I want to read some of the comments—and these are comments, Speaker, from front-line workers I've taken the time to speak to, and some of the things that they're hearing on the front lines.

Front-line staff are hearing that kids are worried and anxious, that they're feeling grief and loss over not being able to be with friends and at school in the same way. There are family breakdowns and meltdowns. They're dealing with children who are depressed, who have harmed themselves, who are struggling with eating disorders, which are typically rooted in another mental health issue, and have thought about suicide—and that's predominantly with pre-teens and teens. They lack motivation to do simple things. They aren't sleeping. They're using drugs and are making other unhealthy and dangerous choices. Those are comments from the front lines. We heard from the minister that the government has made an investment, but that money has to get to the front lines, to the people who need the services.

While vaccinations have allowed us to move more freely, they can't undo the trauma that has been inflicted through the pandemic. In short, our kids have lost their balance.

Pathstone has been seeing kids in person throughout the pandemic, and they tell us that they cannot keep up with demand and the wait-list grows. As of November 12, there were 294 kids waiting for help from the brief services program in Niagara, and they're waiting 190-plus days to get into a short-term program.

We heard from the minister about all of this money that's going for mental health, but we heard from the member from Thunder Bay and from others who are actually talking to workers and talking to families on the ground, and we have to ask, if there's so much money being invested, why is it not getting to the front lines? Why is it not getting to the people who need it?

The fact is that the longer a child waits for treatment, the worse or more complex their issues can become.

Before COVID-19, there was not a wait-list for this program at Pathstone, and the concern is that by the time

these kids are called for brief services, their issue could be worse and more complex, which would then warrant more intense therapy.

This is why people in the mental health field talk about upstream services. It makes sense to provide services upstream, and this government should have prioritized it in their throne speech and their budget so that kids are getting the mental health services they need, because it's going to be more expensive and more harmful to children if they don't get those services upstream. They can't wait 10 years. They can't wait for the government to roll out an investment over five years or 10 years. They need that help now.

Pathstone saw close to 10,000 kids over the past 12 months, which was a 35% increase over the previous year. They're on track to see the same amount of kids this year, in addition to those who are already waiting. This agency is clearly saying that without stable funding, the brief services program and other programs have no chance to work down the wait-list.

Speaker, over the past 10 years, there has been great focus on reducing stigma around mental health. We are clearly seeing the effects, with more kids coming forward for help, which is a good thing. But long wait-lists stifle the progress we've made and, quite frankly, it's damaging to kids and their families.

Why does an agency like Pathstone have to go, hat in hand, to the public, through their charitable foundation, to pay for care for front-line services in a pandemic? Are children not enough of a priority for this government? As others have brought up, are they not as important as a \$10-billion or \$11-billion highway that nobody really wants or needs? I also want to point out, Speaker, that there's an issue with walk-in clinics in Niagara. What's happening in Niagara is that cash-strapped municipalities are being asked to foot the bill for front-line services and walk-in clinics. This is also happening through the foundation. I want to compliment the foundation, and Kim Rossi who runs it, and all the hard-working volunteers who are raising money as quickly as they can to get it to the families in need, but the fact of the matter is that these are core services that are being provided through charitable dollars.

In Niagara, out of the 12 municipalities, there are nine municipalities that have provided free space for the agency and \$20,000—each municipality. The reason they've provided that is because they don't have enough front-line staff to provide basic walk-in services in these free spaces throughout the Niagara region. So why is the government not stepping up to the plate? Why are they leaving core service delivery and staffing to municipalities? I think that's a really troubling trend, Speaker.

I used to run a not-for-profit. I think it's great for every non-profit, every charitable organization—usually they get government funding, especially if they're delivering social services, and it's great for them to have a foundation. I had a great social enterprise at mine. We had a banquet hall and a kitchen that we used for community events, and we used it to raise money. But you can't use

that money for core services. That's not sustainable. Core services that people need have to be funded with government funding. Charitable donations are no sustainable way to provide services to people. What charitable donations are used for and what social enterprise revenue is used for is for seed money for other programs, to expand programs, to try new things out, to have a reserve in case something happens. In my case, it was the Syrian refugee crisis, and we were able to actually use our funding to augment services that we already had.

You cannot sustain core services with charitable funds. It's not sustainable, and it's a bad business practice. That's what's happening in charitable organizations all across the province, and it's definitely happening in mental health.

So if the investments have been made as the minister said and in the amount that he said, why have they not made it to the front line? Why are front-line services still depending on charitable donations?

I'll give you one example in my riding, in the city of Welland. There's an organization called the Hope Centre. For over 40 years, that centre has helped build and strengthen Welland by providing access to community lunch programs, a food bank, housing stability—all of those services that are provided by organizations all over the province. Because they have had government funding and they've also had charitable donations, they've been able to expand, and they've been able to seed other organizations. Just listen to the list of organizations that they've helped start—and this is about having stable government funding and about having charitable donations that help to expand existing programs: Women's Place, Niagara regional youth homes, community legal services, All Peoples day nursery, Niagara Peninsula Homes, Canal View Homes, and McLaughlin community house and tenants' association. These are new associations, new organizations that have been started because they were able to use their charitable donations to expand programs and to help other charitable organizations. That's a model that is sustainable.

I was really surprised, in both the throne speech and the economic statement, that this government didn't take advantage of the tremendous benefit we have here in Ontario of a huge not-for-profit sector. That's money that could have been provided to augment core programs, that could have made it directly into communities all over the province—instead of having these announcements over five, 10 years, where the government can stand up and just talk in a throne speech but we don't actually see the results of those investments on the ground.

1630

That was my disappointment with the throne speech—that it said a lot but didn't do much at all.

I hope the government will take these words to heart and will think about their strategy when it comes to not-for-profits, which is a huge sector across Ontario, and also mental health services, which are using their charitable dollars to support core funding that the government should really be providing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the member for Niagara Centre for his speech and for the work he does in the Niagara region.

He spoke a lot about mental health, and I appreciate the fact that there are severe challenges across the province with regard to mental health.

I want to know if the member can speak a little bit about the importance of the 5% increase to mental health funding across the board for Niagara institutions, including Pathstone, which received an additional \$450,000 for annualized increases to their base funding, as well as, of course, the mobile mental health clinic that was referenced by Minister Tibollo, which is going to be servicing rural parts of Niagara to provide mobile mental health.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member from Niagara West for the question.

Any investments are good. Of course, I'm in favour of any government that makes investments in mental health. But the bottom line is that it's not enough and that what's being announced isn't getting to the front line. So, yes, a mobile clinic is a great idea. But the fact is, as I said, that a shocking amount of core services are being provided with charitable dollars.

We already were way behind from previous Liberal governments and their lack of investment, and rather than fixing the problem, we're actually just kicking the ball down the road.

As I said, significant investments have to be made upstream or these wait-lists will continue to get longer and longer.

I agree with him that the investments that were talked about are good, but the bottom line is, they're not enough.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Hamilton west–Ancaster–Dundas has a question.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you for your speech.

Honestly, we all know in all of our communities that young people are struggling with mental health concerns. McMaster Children's Hospital has been sounding the alarm. They have an incredible rise in the number of young people who are showing up at their emergency department. We heard from the MPP for Hamilton Mountain that there's a 700-month waiting list for kids just to be seen. And this is at a time when the government likes to throw out big numbers—but as you said, these dollars aren't making it to the front line; they're not making it into communities.

We just had an FAO report that shows that this government is cutting—they underspent by almost three quarters of a million dollars in education, which is the first place where kids need to be seen and be treated in a respectful way that helps them address some of their mental health concerns.

Can you talk about the government saying that the money is everywhere, but we don't see it in the field?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my friend for the question.

A throne speech is a chance to outline priorities, and it's an indication of what the government is going to do with

their spending and how they're going to spend public money on services. As an indication of priorities, what we've seen roll out is an \$11-billion investment in highways that no one wants, while people are coming to this Legislature—myself and many others—as my friend has pointed out, saying that the agencies in our ridings are not getting the money they need to help children with mental health.

So what are really the priorities of this government? It's a legitimate question. A throne speech, I would have thought, would outline a significant investment and also how they're going to get it into communities, then we should have seen an economic statement of that significant investment.

We should be seeing things happening on the ground, and what we're seeing is wait-lists piling up.

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

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you to the member for his discussion and for emphasizing mental health, which is something that is such a crisis in this province. That is something we probably all can agree on.

The Thunder Bay District Health Unit advises as of November 18 that if you're having a mental health crisis, you call 911—so then it's dumping it on the paramedics—or visit your emergency room, which is packed, overcrowded and under-resourced. Then there is a crisis phone line they can call that's only operational once in a while. So we know that there's an urgency.

I really appreciated your comments about the not-for-profit sector, because we have many of those trying to cobble together resources so that people have someplace to go when they're in crisis.

Could you further tell us how we would see stable funding as the answer for the non-profit sector?

Mr. Jeff Burch: It's a great question. I want to thank my friend from Thunder Bay for all of the care and attention that she puts into these issues in her riding, especially with the tremendous addictions issues that are taking place in the north and in Thunder Bay. I'm familiar, actually, with some of the not-for-profits in her area, especially the settlement agency, who have often dealt with newcomers and refugees who settle—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Through the Chair—so we can hear you, please.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Sorry—newcomers and refugees who settle in Canada and have tremendous mental health issues. That, coupled with addiction issues, makes things even more difficult in places like Thunder Bay.

What really needs to happen is long-term, stable funding, and like we've been discussing, that funding needs to get to the front line, and we need to see results and outcomes in the community.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you to the member from Niagara Centre for your comments today.

I want to ask what you're seeing on the ground. Every time we ask this government about what they're doing

about mental health, all we hear is, “Oh, well, we’ve invested this much, and we’re spending the most ever.” But what I’m seeing on the ground in Toronto is absolutely appalling. We’ve got a homelessness crisis. We’ve got an opioid epidemic. We’ve got people dying daily on the streets of Toronto.

I was talking to one person who is homeless. She has lost 17 friends this year alone; this is 17 people she knows.

Everybody who walks to this Legislature has to walk past tent encampments and people sleeping on the streets, and we’ve got snow on the ground out there. This government is not taking any action.

The only numbers that really matter are the number of people who are sleeping on the streets, the number of people with mental health and addiction issues who cannot get the treatment they need.

What are you seeing in Niagara Centre? Is the situation similar? Are you seeing any benefit from any of the government’s rhetoric around supports for mental health and addictions?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my friend for that excellent question.

I am seeing some of the same issues in Niagara Centre, but I think what we’re seeing now through this conversation is that mental health and addictions issues take a different form in every community. Toronto has some very specific issues with mental health and addictions, around homelessness. We have problems that are very specific to Thunder Bay and northern communities. And in Niagara, certainly, we have a lot of opioid issues. I just described many of the issues with children’s mental health.

I think what needs to happen, in addition to what we’ve discussed, like a significant investment, is that mental health and addictions needs to be its own ministry within the government. That’s what the NDP has proposed in the past, and if elected government, that’s what we would do in the future so that it receives the priority it really needs and we can start addressing specific problems in each specific—

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

1640

Mr. Bill Walker: It’s a pleasure to hear the member from Niagara Centre. Some of the things I’m going to say, I know he wasn’t here for, so it’s not really his fault that some of those things may or may not have happened. He spoke a lot about mental health, and we all obviously have mental health concerns across this great province. Part of that is because of 15 years of the former Liberals, who didn’t really do a whole lot there; they didn’t put in a lot of plans. I think most of the people I talk to in the opposition benches—and I sat there for many, many years—know that you can’t just flip a switch and have things happen overnight.

There are great things: We actually appointed, as you just made the comment, an associate minister of health for the first time ever, and he’s doing stellar work to try to move the process, to move the systems and ensure that

there are boots on the ground and bodies to be able to help with those front-line services.

So I’m hopeful, and you’ve articulated that, again, the throne speech is kind of a blueprint, that we’ll get there. I hope you will support those things that he’s doing and work very actively with him in your community to make them both come to fruition. I hope you’ll be able to support us and vote for our next budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Well, let’s find out. You have 30 seconds—25 now—to respond.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you for the question. I think what really needs to happen is that words need to be put into action. I agree with you that things have happened, but I think I’ve been very clear that, first of all, it’s not enough; secondly, it’s over a long period of time, so it sounds different than what it actually is; and finally, it’s not getting to the people who need it. Those are the problems, as I see it.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It’s always an honour to rise in the House and engage in debate in the government’s throne speech. Speaker, I have to say, it happened to be one of the most uninspiring throne speeches I think I’ve ever heard, because it failed to address many of the concerns the people of Ontario are facing right now.

There was no mention whatsoever in the throne speech about the climate emergency or the housing affordability crisis. And there was no plan, no clear plan for how to get us through the COVID-19 pandemic and come out stronger on the other side; no plan for how to better support our nurses and other front-line health care workers with fair wages and better working conditions; no plan to keep our schools safe with lower class sizes and better ventilation; no plan for getting our kids vaccinated; no plan for paid sick days so their parents can take time off from work to get their kids vaccinated, or workers could stay home when they are sick; no plan to get ahead of the virus with increased testing and contact tracing, getting those rapid tests out of the warehouses they’re in right now; nothing about additional financial supports to help struggling small businesses get through the third wave of the pandemic with a third round of funding to support them.

It’s too early for the government to say, “Mission accomplished.” We need a government that’s going to make proactive investments to be ahead of the virus to get us through this pandemic so we can get on to building a greener and more caring Ontario.

Speaker, in the limited time I have today, I want to spend a few moments talking about how we can build a greener and more caring Ontario, starting with a plan to address both the climate crisis and the housing affordability crisis at the same time.

It’s clear: The IPCC has said that if we do not crush climate pollution immediately, we face catastrophic consequences, unprecedented consequences that we’re starting to see the beginnings of right now with the flooding in British Columbia and now Atlantic Canada,

and the forest fires we saw on the west coast and in northwestern Ontario this summer, where six First Nations communities had to be evacuated and air quality all across the province threatened people's health.

At the same time, Ontario is neck-deep in a housing affordability crisis, Speaker, a crisis that's been building since the 1990s and reached a breaking point today. It takes 63 hours for the average minimum wage worker to afford an apartment in Barrie, 55 hours in Kingston, and in Toronto half the city's population is unable to afford a one-bedroom apartment. It takes the average Ontarian 15 years to save for a down payment on a house. This is simply unsustainable. There are 16,000 Ontarians right now across this province that don't even have a place to call home tonight. We can address both of these crises at the same time by stamping out urban sprawl and building livable, affordable communities, communities where people can live, work and play close to home.

Instead of spending billions on highways that will supercharge climate pollution and urban sprawl, paving over the farmland that feeds us and the wetlands that protect us from flooding and protect our drinking water, let's build communities where people can live, work, play and shop. No one wants to spend hours commuting long distances just to find an affordable place to call home, but the government's plans to build more highways will do exactly that to people, making it harder and harder for them to live and work in the same communities.

Ontario Greens have a plan to build 15-minute neighbourhoods and communities where you can live, work, shop and play close to home; communities where we stamp out urban sprawl and save people money from commuting and save municipalities money on the infrastructure to service them; communities where we provide people with more housing choices by changing zoning rules so they can build duplexes and triplexes and quadplexes, secondary suites, laneway housing, co-housing and tiny homes; plans to work with non-profit and co-op housing providers to build 100,000 affordable housing spaces, 60,000 permanent supportive housing spaces and 22,000 Indigenous-owned affordable housing spaces.

In addition to a plan to provide an affordable place to call home, let's have an affordable home for people to live in, a home where we can help them save money by saving energy, by investing money and making our homes more energy efficient and accessible, creating thousands of jobs and lowering climate pollution at the same time. Let's build communities with electrified public transportation so people can get around while reducing pollution and reducing their costs at the same time. It costs one tenth to operate an electric vehicle than it does to operate a gas-powered vehicle.

Speaker, we have solutions. Let's get to work building a greener and more caring Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): A reminder to all members to wear your mask unless you're speaking or taking a sip of water. Thank you.

The first question, the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member from Guelph for his comments. I do take issue with some of the comments at the beginning, where he said there has been no support for small businesses. There's been hundreds of millions of dollars in support for small business.

He said there's not ventilation in schools. Pretty much every school and every room in this province has had ventilation changes, with the \$1.6 billion spent to support education.

He talked about housing. I know Minister Clark was up in my riding to do the groundbreaking for the largest purpose-built rental development in the history of Muskoka: 232 units, hundreds of millions of dollars for this project in Gravenhurst. That's one third of the supply of all the rental housing in Gravenhurst. We were there for the ground-breaking of it.

We have a plan. He said that there's no plan for reopening. We have a very cautious plan that I would say is working—89% of the population is vaccinated and now we have five-to 11-year-olds getting vaccinated. I'm pleased to say my two granddaughters, six and eight, are now vaccinated—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. I turn to the member from Guelph for a response.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'm happy that the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka's grandchildren are vaccinated. I think we all can agree that we're happy that that has happened, absolutely.

Speaker, if the member opposite had listened to my comments, I said that businesses need a third round of funding from the Ontario Small Business Support Grant. They have received two rounds of funding. They need a third round of funding, and we need expanded eligibility for those small businesses who have fallen through the cracks. I can't tell you how many small businesses have reached out to my office who have been significantly hurt by the pandemic and have yet to receive government supports. So let's provide those small businesses with the supports they need.

1650

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you to the member from Guelph for his take on a government that is completely failing the province when it comes to the environment. You know we had a series of scathing reports from the Auditor General last week. Very specifically, when it comes to species at risk, the Auditor General said, "Our audit" found that "the environment ministry's systems and processes" for approvals "facilitate and enable harm to species" at risk "and their habitats."

She also found that 10 out of the 15 members of the species-at-risk committee have industry ties, and half of these 10 are registered lobbyists. We also know that the government has exempted themselves from any environmental assessment when it comes to the Bradford Bypass, and we hear reports that a private meeting at a golf course with the Minister of Transportation and the assistant

minister—at his father’s golf course—miraculously seemed to have coincided with a route moving.

My question to you is, how can anybody in this province trust this government when it comes to protecting our environment or the \$11 billion we’re spending on highways?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Back to the member from Guelph for a response.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks. I appreciate the question from the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Got it.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Got it. Great.

It’s interesting on endangered species because I had to look three, four times to make sure the percentage was right, but the number of permits to harm species has increased—Speaker, get this—6,262%.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Unbelievable.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Like, unbelievable. Granted, some of that happened with the previous Liberal government, so let’s hold them accountable as well. But the two combined, over 6,000%, Speaker—unbelievable. The fact that no permit has been denied—an application that would harm a species at risk. At a time when we are facing mass extinction events happening around the world, we need to be doing more, not less, to protect species at risk.

When it comes to the highways, I just noticed that on the ERO, the government just posted a posting exempting Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass from the environmental assessment process to fast-track it. That is not the kind of development that’s going to protect—

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

Further debate?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: It is an honour to be able to stand in the Legislature today and be able to bring remarks on behalf of the good people of Niagara West, who I’ve had the great good fortune and the blessing to be able to represent now for just over five years. I recall very vividly—

Interjections.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you—the first time I had the opportunity to walk in these doors in November 2016. In fact, tomorrow will be five years since I was sworn in as a member of provincial Parliament. Thank you.

I had the opportunity then to speak to the issues that were being raised by my constituents of what was then known as Niagara West–Glanbrook. As I’m sure the Speaker is well aware, the former member for the riding of Niagara West–Glanbrook, who served for many years with distinction, decided his fortunes lay in other avenues and his ability to serve the good people of this province lay in his advocacy with the Ontario Real Estate Association, where he serves ably to this day.

But when I walked in the front doors of this chamber some five years ago, many of the issues that were top of mind for my constituents and, frankly, were many of the issues that I felt were the most important ones facing the people of the riding that I represented—many of those issues, as I stand here today and look back over the past

five years, have or are indeed coming to the place where they’re being addressed. I think that’s a remarkable testimony to the government of Ontario’s ability under Premier Ford, and the Progressive Conservative government as a whole, to listen to the needs of rural Ontario and small-town Ontario.

Let me back this up a little bit perhaps by providing a little bit of a framework as to what the various issues are that were so top of mind for so many of my constituents five years ago and what the issues are that they’re raising today. I’m not going to get pulled into getting too much into COVID, although I recognize that it’s so important that we maintain the progress that has been made to this point, that we understand where we’ve come from and how much work has gone into where we are today and that we don’t lose that progress, that we retain that progress—but I’m going to speak a little about some of the local infrastructure projects.

In order to understand this, I think it’s important to look at what the former Liberal government had in place. I don’t say this out of any desire to be spiteful or hurtful to the members from, I guess I wouldn’t call it the loyal opposition, but the third party, but I think it’s important to look at where we were. This is a government that in 2012 cancelled the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital in their budget, which was supported by the New Democratic Party of that day. I recognize there’s a slightly different composition in the caucus, and yet it’s still a party that supported that government’s cuts to health care in 2012.

This was an area that had been neglected for many, many years when it came to key infrastructure investments in areas such as broadband access, something that, of course, those who live in bigger cities might be used to having for quite some time, but for my parents living on a farm in rural west Niagara, they only got high-speed Internet in 2010. So for them, it was still quite fresh, and I can tell you their speeds are not exactly what we’re used to when we’re here at the Legislature. So the people of my riding spoke about the need for investments in broadband access.

We heard about the need to address crumbling infrastructure. We heard a lot from the former Liberal government about spending. We knew they loved to tax, they loved to spend, and yet, at the end of those years there was so very little that they were able to show for their years of spending and taxing and taxing and spending. So when I came to office, those priorities—rural infrastructure, rural health care, investing in small-town infrastructure through community projects—were ones that people in my community said, “Sam, what we feel like is that the world seems to end at the Burlington Skyway”—that the projects, that the issues, that the cares of the former government, the things that really seemed to motivate them, the reasons that they stayed in office were not for the benefit of the whole province.

If you think of the province in sort of three categories, you think of the rural settings, the urban settings and the suburban settings, and each one of those components, roughly a third of the population of the province, making

up a sort of unique characteristic. My constituency is both, I would say, suburban/rural. It has smaller urban centres with 25,000, 30,000 people as well as more rural areas. I understand that there are many members in this House who represent similar types of ridings.

Yet what's happened for so long was that the world at the end of the Burlington Skyway seemed to disappear for the Liberal government. They didn't care about the issues in Hamilton, they didn't care about the issues in Niagara, and they were so focused on rewarding their donor buddies that they weren't able to see the fact that in Niagara and Hamilton and so many smaller towns across Ontario, people were hurting. They were hurting with skyrocketing hydro rates and they were hurting with corruption that wasn't allowing investments to go in to the places where it was needed. So I think it's important, as I look at this throne speech, that we also reflect on where we've come over the past three years.

Yes, the challenges of COVID have had a unique and enormous impact on our ability to engage proactively with the various matters that we were all sent here, in 2018—the world in 2018 was a very different world indeed than it is in 2021, and we need to recognize that. But I look at so many of the subject matters that they sent me here for, whether it's investing through the Ontario Together Fund to expand manufacturing capacity in Beamsville with Ophardt Hygiene, whether it's expanding mental health resources through, of course, community outlets such as Pathstone Mental Health and the work that they do, and the local mobile mental health clinics, as the ones announced by Minister of Mental Health and Addictions earlier this year, together with PA Barrett. When I look at the SWIFT program that's expanding broadband access across rural Niagara, including in St. Anns, Wainfleet, Winger and Fenwick, these are areas that for so long were little more than places on a map for bureaucrats here in downtown Toronto, in their ivory towers, looking out across Lake Ontario and perhaps seeing Niagara as little more than a smudge on the horizon, perhaps thinking they'd like to go and visit a couple of the vineyards, but not realizing the hundreds of thousands of people who make that their home, who ensure that those places are fostering their dream of home ownership, of their ability to raise their children and to be a part of a society in a very active and vigorous way, who are involved, whether it's volunteering with local community organizations, whether it's being part of the local schools and churches and soccer clubs that make up west Niagara and the rest of our communities.

1700

When I look at where the province of Ontario was when we came into power, with a power-hungry government that at the time was so focused on urban elites, that didn't realize the other two thirds of the province also had to be heard, and then I look at the actions our government has taken in so many areas, from mental health to regular health care investments, whether from education and expanding and building new schools in communities like mine and so many others across this province—I think of

Desbarats, where I was announcing investments earlier last month, or Espanola, where we announced a new build—these are exciting times to be an Ontarian, looking at what we can do when a government is in office that works for the people.

When I look at our throne speech, I see a continuation of that same desire to be a government that came to office, yes, for the people, yes, for Ontario, but also yes for the future. It's so important as legislators that we sit here in this home, this temple of democracy, and we consider not just what we are doing for today's generation—yes, responding proactively or reactively to the issues that come forward every single day, every single weekend, and I know a week ago Omicron was not the topic of conversation that it is even today—and yet also looking forward proactively and asking what we need to build in order to ensure that our children, like my son, Sullivan, and our grandchildren are able to grow up in a province that supports them, that ensures they have access to the same quality of life or a better quality of life than the one that many of us were raised in.

I recognize that we also have many, many new Ontarians here who we welcome with open arms, as people who come here to build Ontario, to build a better life for themselves and their children, and we admire that.

Speaker, when I think about those areas, I recognize that we have to, again, look back at the areas that we took for granted. What were the roads and bridges that were built 30 years ago, 20 years ago, 50 years ago that we rode on to get here?

I made a little bit of a comment about the Burlington Skyway. I don't mean anything against my colleagues from Burlington, but that's a bit of a marker, and I think my colleagues from Niagara will know that. When you're driving back to Niagara and you cross the Burlington Skyway and you can see the rest of Niagara ahead of you, you know you're coming to that point where you're almost home, almost back in your backyard.

Someone had to build that Burlington Skyway at some point. Someone had to build the hospitals that you pass on your way heading back home. Someone had to build up that infrastructure that in many ways we take for granted. Someone had to build the hydroelectric stations that supply so much of our clean energy here in Ontario. Someone had to build the Pickering nuclear plant in order to ensure that we have clean, reliable, affordable energy here in Ontario.

The people who helped build that, yes, were workers, yes, were labourers, yes, were engineers, and people working together in so many ways, but they also, in a small way, were politicians, people like ourselves who served, whether within cabinet or as advocates for their communities for local projects, saying, "We recognize that what we have today might be good for today, but what about tomorrow? What does the world look like in 1940? What does the world look like in 1980? What does the world look like in 2020?"

So today, as we are making our mark on this Parliament, we look at what this Parliament has accomplished,

both in responding to and engaging with COVID-19—which I do believe will be, of course, an important legacy of our government—but also at what we are doing to ensure that in 2060 another legislator is able to stand here, perhaps at this very desk, and speak about the investments and changes that are being made by each and every one of us. I believe that the throne speech that has been presented speaks to that need. It addresses that need for legacy, not out of some vainglorious idea of maintaining a personal legacy for any politician—frankly, I can't really tell you too many of the people who built that Burlington Skyway or who built the Adam Beck plants, of course, aside from Adam Beck, down in Niagara Falls that power so much of our area. I can't tell you the individual names of the many people who donated time, energy, resources into building up our local hospitals, into building up our universities, but I can tell you that there were many, many people who came together to do so. As a response to that collective will of so many people, other people in this House, other members of the Legislative Assembly here in Ontario, decided that action needed to be taken. They decided to strike commissions. They decided to build highways. They decided to build subways. They decided to build colleges, universities, hospitals, schools—so many of the things that we now, yes, take for granted, but that required foresight, that required investment, that required consideration of the need not just for that generation but of future generations. Speaker, that is what I believe our government is doing with not just this throne speech, but with the actions that have been taken for the past three and a half years and the actions that we need to take going forward.

Yes, I recognize we live in a time which is turbulent. We live in a time that has challenges that perhaps are unique to the 21st century. We think about so many of the other difficult times in our world's history, even just over the past hundred years of wars, of recessions, of depressions and of global uncertainty—and yet everything is so instantaneous now, everything is so at our fingertips as a result of rapid digitization that it becomes increasingly challenging for us to see what's happening in other parts of the world and still stay focused on what's going on in front of us.

The world has always been changed by small acts of faithfulness, and I believe that each and every one of us, as a member of a very unique group of people who in the province of Ontario have that opportunity to speak on behalf of so many others—for myself, I take my responsibility as the only government member from Niagara, with all due respect to my colleagues in the opposition, very seriously. It means that I have the opportunity, uniquely, to advocate within the government caucus on behalf of almost half a million Niagarans about the issues that are important to them—again, respecting that my colleagues from those ridings do speak about the issues that are important to their constituents, but from, again, a slightly different perspective.

That responsibility also lies in how we bring forward these types of documents, how throne speeches are structured, how budgets are structured and how the fall

economic statement is structured, in such a way that it encourages the unique blend of industry, of innovation, of forward-looking opportunity, while also retaining the best of our tradition here in this province.

That's what I believe this throne speech does, Speaker. Yes, it closed a chapter, in a way—the proroguing of the Legislature closed that session of this Parliament—but we begin a new chapter with this throne speech; we begin a new opportunity. Each and every one of us, as members of this Legislature who have the opportunity to vote on not just this throne speech but on the legislation that is permitted as a result of it, has the opportunity to place our print upon it. May we take that responsibility with a great deal of very, very serious consideration, because at the end of the day, we will answer not just to our hundred thousand constituents that each and every one of us represent, but to history and to God himself.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Your first question comes from the member from Niagara Centre.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my colleague from Niagara West for his speech. I always appreciate the passion that he shows on the issues.

One of the first things I did when I was elected was propose a motion for full-day, all-day GO service all the way to Niagara Falls by 2021, and I was really pleased that it passed unanimously in this House. Everyone in the government voted for that motion.

I'm wondering if the member could tell me: How do you expect to get past the Burlington Skyway when you're focused on spending \$11 billion on two highways north of Toronto?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the member opposite.

Very rapidly after our government came to office, we expanded GO train service so that we had—for a period of time, heading into the pandemic, it was the first time that Niagara had an all-day GO train. It was the first time we had all-day, two-way, every single day. No matter which day it was—it wasn't just service on the weekends; it wasn't just service in the summer—you could get in and out of Niagara on a GO train. That was truly historic. I recognize that had not been expanded to the extent that we all wish it had. I understand, of course, that we want to see more trains running, and I know that there are very active and ongoing conversations with both local governments and, of course, with the Ministry of Transportation and Metrolinx about what that looks like. But I know that our government remains firmly committed to ensuring that that moves forward. I will say that due to COVID-19—I know that had a huge impact on ridership as well, so there was a pause in that and a bit of a recalibration, but that plan to expand continues going forward.

1710

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Speaker, you will know that back in March, the government announced a plan to provide Ontarians of all ages with mental health and addiction supports. Since then, we've made additional investments in that particular area.

Would the member from Niagara West please update the members of the House on our government's progress, particularly as it relates to the throne speech?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I appreciate the member for Whitby's advocacy for his community and this important issue.

I've spoken a couple of times this afternoon already about the expansion of the mobile mental health clinic, of which there are four different programs running in rural communities across this province, but also a massive increase—a huge injection of cash—into the base funding, the annualized operational funding of many, many, many various mental health organizations in our communities that do incredible work, and that for many years, under the former Liberal government, barely got by. A 5% increase is a massive increase, because that's predictable, that's every single year.

Actually, in this year's budget, we're making a record-breaking \$525 million in net new annualized funding and an additional \$194 million to immediately expand access to safe and effective mental health and addiction supports throughout the pandemic.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I listened carefully to the member from Niagara West's comments.

I was thinking back to the throne speech and what was missing. We've had others here mention missed opportunities. There was not one mention of schools, of education in that throne speech. As far as I recall, the member from Niagara West is still the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education. He receives additional resources, staffing. I have yet to have heard any mention of education from this member in question period or any other time in I don't know how long.

I'm wondering if the member advocated for education, for smaller class sizes and safer schools to be included in that throne speech—and if he failed, why?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: The member opposite should definitely listen more carefully, because I mentioned multiple times the importance of building new schools here, and I also actually was speaking in question period earlier last week. Perhaps if the member opposite was a little more attentive, she would hear about more of this.

I think she raised a really important point, and it gives me an opportunity to speak to the \$600 million that was just announced, actually, last week by Minister Lecce along with Minister Surma. Our government announced over \$600 million in new funding in order to build new schools here in the province of Ontario.

I have to tell the member opposite, when I had the opportunity to go up to northern Ontario last month—and I'll be going to various places across the province next month to announce more important new investments that are being made in our education system—people were thrilled to see the expansion in ventilation; they were thrilled to see the expansion in mental health supports, a quadrupling of mental health in our schools. That's

because of the investments made under this Premier and this minister, Stephen Lecce.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: I was a high school teacher throughout the 1990s. When I started teaching in 1990, our schools in Toronto were very well maintained. Then the Conservatives got in—Harris, then Eves—and I saw the funding go. At one point, they told us that they weren't going to put chalk on our ledges anymore; we had to go to the office to ask for chalk for our schools.

By the time the Harris-Eves Conservatives were done, there was a \$5.9-billion maintenance backlog in our schools. The Liberals took that and they created it into a \$15.9-billion maintenance backlog.

This Conservative government has been in power for three and a half years, and the maintenance backlog is now \$16.8 billion.

You were talking about building on the legacy that was left to us from previous generations, but what I've seen from both Conservative and Liberal governments is pillaging that legacy by not maintaining the schools that were built and paid for by previous generations.

What will your government do to eliminate the maintenance backlog in our schools?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the member for the question.

I have to say, you'll have to make sure we go on visits together to some of these schools that are being built across this province. There are over 100 different construction projects under way, as we speak, and 260 projects that are in development to ensure that we're addressing this backlog.

Speaker, this is a backlog, as mentioned by the member opposite, that—the Liberal government was in power for 15 years, and what did they do? They closed 600 schools with—wait for it—the support of the NDP. Why was that? Why is it now that the member opposite has the opportunity to raise these important questions—and I agree; we need to build more schools, we need to invest more in schools, and that's what we're doing. It's why we've made the single largest increase in supports for education this province has ever seen, under the leadership of Premier Doug Ford.

What we didn't see from the party opposite was that—when they had the opportunity to demand real results from the former government, they quietly stayed away.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: Speaker, it's true; our government is protecting our progress. We are building Ontario, and we are working for workers.

I so appreciate the member from Niagara West's point of view. We're making significant investments in health care, and while it's not part of the throne speech, I was wondering—we're investing in hospitals all across the province of Ontario. I would like him to be able to explain to the people listening what it means to the people in

Niagara West to see the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital get rebuilt in his riding.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the member from Brantford–Brant.

It means so much; it's hard to properly express it unless you've been in the community. I was born there the year that they were protesting to keep it open, that my constituents were rallying behind that hospital to ensure that it stayed open. Multiple times over the years, the Liberal government said, "Well, we might be able to find a way to get it in there. We might be able to see if we can find a capital project where it fits. Oh, never mind, we're going to cancel it"—after they've raised over 10 million of local priority. So to be able to see this become a reality, to be able to see a modern hospital in west Niagara, one that will have top-of-the-line care provided in our community, worth over \$200 million, from the provincial government—is a real commitment that, frankly, Niagara hasn't seen in a very, very long time. It speaks to the importance of ensuring that we're maintaining our progress and building a better tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for a quick question and a quick response.

Mr. Chris Glover: I'll ask the member to correct his comments from before, because he said that the NDP supported the closing of 600 schools. I can tell you that between the years 2000 and 2014, I was supporting Rosario Marchese, and we held press conference after press conference opposing school closings. So will the member correct his record?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the member opposite.

Earlier, in the Legislature, we had an excellent speech from the member from Ottawa Centre. He spoke about the fact that actions speak louder than words. We know that the NDP is very good at speaking nice words. We know they love to say they're on the side of the worker. They love to say they're about building a better tomorrow. They love to say that progress is possible with the NDP. And yet actions speak louder than words. At the end of the day, the NDP decided to support the Liberals when they brought forward budgets that closed schools. They decided to support the Liberals when they brought forward budgets that didn't invest in Ontario. That's why—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you.
Report continues in volume B.

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Arnott, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Arthur, Ian (NDP)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Baber, Roman (IND)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Begum, Doly (NDP)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
Berns-McGown, Rima (NDP)	Beaches—East York / Beaches—East York	
Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC)	Pickering—Uxbridge	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins	
Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister of Legislative Affairs / Ministre des Affaires législatives Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough North / Scarborough-Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	Associate Minister of Transportation (Transit-Oriented Communities) / Ministre associé des Transports (Aménagement axé sur les transports en commun)
Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds— Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	
Crawford, Stephen (PC)	Oakville	
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Elliott, Hon. / L'hon. Christine (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fee, Amy (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Fullerton, Hon. / L'hon. Merrilee (PC)	Kanata—Carleton	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Hon. / L'hon. Parm (PC)	Milton	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiles et du Multiculturalisme
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gravelle, Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor—Tecumseh	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hillier, Randy (IND)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Solicitor General / Solliciteure générale
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karahalios, Belinda C. (NBP)	Cambridge	
Karpoche, Bhutilla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Ke, Vincent (PC)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
Khanjin, Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kramp, Daryl (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC)	Nepean	Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries / ministre des Industries du patrimoine, du sport, du tourisme et de la culture
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Hon. / L'hon. Jane (PC)	Burlington	Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues / Ministre associée déléguée au dossier de l'Enfance et à la Condition féminine
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
Miller, Norman (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (IND)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Park, Lindsey (IND)	Durham	
Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Rod (PC)	Ajax	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Hon. / L'hon. Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Associate Minister of Digital Government / Ministre associé délégué de l'Action pour un gouvernement numérique
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre du Développement du Nord, des Mines, des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associée déléguée aux Petites Entreprises et à la Réduction des formalités administratives
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Deputy Speaker / Vice-président

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	
Vacant	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Randy Pettapiece
Teresa J. Armstrong, Toby Barrett
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto
Goldie Ghamari, Randy Hillier
Christina Maria Mitas, Judith Monteith-Farrell
Michael Parsa, Randy Pettapiece
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Ian Arthur
Ian Arthur, Will Bouma
Stephen Crawford, Catherine Fife
Ernie Hardeman, Mitzie Hunter
Logan Kanapathi, Sol Mamakwa
Jeremy Roberts, Dave Smith
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Michael Bushara

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Président: Logan Kanapathi
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Mike Schreiner
Jill Andrew, Robert Bailey
Will Bouma, Guy Bourgouin
Chris Glover, Mike Harris
Logan Kanapathi, Sheref Sabawy
Amarjot Sandhu, Mike Schreiner
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Président: Gilles Bisson
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Deepak Anand, Aris Babikian
Gilles Bisson, Lorne Coe
Wayne Gates, Robin Martin
Norman Miller, Billy Pang
Amanda Simard, Marit Stiles
John Yakabuski
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lucille Collard
Lucille Collard, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Natalia Kusendova
Jim McDonell, Suze Morrison
Randy Pettapiece, Gurratan Singh
Donna Skelly, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Présidente: Laurie Scott
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Rima Berns-McGown, France Gélinas
Goldie Ghamari, Faisal Hassan
Jim McDonell, Sam Oosterhoff
Laurie Scott, Vijay Thanigasalam
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Taras Natyshak
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Christine Hogarth
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Jessica Bell, Stephen Blais
Stephen Crawford, Rudy Cuzzetto
Christine Hogarth, Michael Mantha
Taras Natyshak, Michael Parsa
Amarjot Sandhu
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Aris Babikian
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Fraser
Aris Babikian, Lorne Coe
John Fraser, Vincent Ke
Laura Mae Lindo, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Jeremy Roberts
Dave Smith, Daisy Wai
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Présidente: Natalia Kusendova
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Bhutila Karpoche
Aris Babikian, Jeff Burch
Amy Fee, Michael Gravelle
Joel Harden, Mike Harris
Bhutila Karpoche, Natalia Kusendova
Robin Martin, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

**Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight /
Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations
d'urgence**

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Tom Rakocevic
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
John Fraser, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Robin Martin
Sam Oosterhoff, Tom Rakocevic
Donna Skelly, Sara Singh
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell