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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

EM-5

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

EM-5

**Select Committee
on Emergency Management
Oversight**

Emergency orders review

**Comité spécial de la
surveillance de la gestion
des situations d'urgence**

Étude sur les décrets d'urgence

2nd Session
42nd Parliament

Thursday 10 February 2022

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Jeudi 10 février 2022

Chair: Daryl Kramp
Clerk: Christopher Tyrell

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**SELECT COMMITTEE
ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
OVERSIGHT**

**COMITÉ SPÉCIAL DE LA
SURVEILLANCE DE LA GESTION
DES SITUATIONS D'URGENCE**

Thursday 10 February 2022

Jeudi 10 février 2022

The committee met at 1000 in room 151 and by video conference.

EMERGENCY ORDERS REVIEW

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): I'll go ahead and start the meeting now. Generally, I talk relatively clearly; however, I have no teeth at this particular point due to an illness situation, so if for some reason you cannot explicitly understand me, please just indicate that, and I will try to speak a little bit more slowly and a little bit more clearly. Thank you very kindly.

We have the following members in the room: Of course, we have our guest here today, the Honourable Paul Calandra, who will be substituting for the Solicitor General. Welcome, Minister. We are also joined, of course, by staff from legislative research, broadcast and recording, and House Publications and Language Services.

To make sure that everyone can follow along, it is important that all participants speak slowly and clearly. Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak so that we can keep a little semblance of order here. Please also try to remember to unmute yourself before you begin speaking. As always, all comments by members should be directed through the Chair. Thank you very much.

Are there any other questions that we see from the audience? Yes, I see a question. Mr. Harden, please.

Mr. Joel Harden: I just wanted to seek, by way of a point of order, some clarification this morning. I know a lot of us have some important questions with respect to the work of this committee. If, in the course of asking Minister Calandra a question, the questioner is led to believe that there's either a very, very elaborate response or there's not an actual response to the question—and again, I intend to pose all my questions this morning collegially and in good faith. I respect all the members of this committee. I just wanted some clarification from you. If we lift our hand, it would be your prerogative as Chair to return the microphone back to the questioner. We have limited amounts of time, and our communities want us here asking questions. I was just wondering if you could clarify that. And I have one more follow-up question, Chair. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): For that, yes, the Chair will recognize your request. However, common sense, if the minister is obviously right in the middle of a

response that is deemed to be critically important and is obviously not a complete run-on—the Chair will recognize your point and move on to your next question, but if we were in the middle of a question, I think it would be discourteous to not at least give it a reasonable time for a response. Are you comfortable with that, Mr. Harden?

Mr. Joel Harden: Absolutely, MPP Kramp. I trust your judgment in that respect.

I have a follow-up question: If, during the course of our meeting this morning, constant points of order are used to interrupt any questioner of any caucus present in the work of this committee, I'm just wondering if it's the practice of this committee to intervene at that point and ask people continuously raising points of order to simply allow the person who has their speaking time to pose their questions. I'm wondering about your thoughts on that, just before we get started. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): That's also a valid point. The Chair will not hesitate to clamp down on any restrictions that appear to be imposed by fellow members on one another. But common sense will once again prevail here, and I hope you will trust the judgment of the Chair to be able to continue the meeting without having any problem with someone trying to obfuscate or to dominate that time.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Do we have any other comments now? Yes, Mr. Fraser, please.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much to my colleague Joel Harden for asking those questions. I support them fully, given I only have nine minutes in total, and I appreciate the Chair's openness to ensuring that there's some fairness in this.

I would like to ask, what is the rotation for questions today?

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): My understanding is the rotation for questions is as it always is. There's been no deviation, no change at all. I could read through them if you wish, sir, but I think we're pretty comfortable—

Mr. John Fraser: That's fine. No, I was just ensuring that the rotations are not rotating.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): No, no. Everything is all as it has been since the start of the first meeting, and it's just all the way through.

Mr. John Fraser: Perfect. Good. Thanks for reminding me.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): You're welcome. Any other questions? Seeing none, we will proceed further.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated October 7, 2021, the select committee has been appointed to receive oral reports from the Premier or his designate or designates on any extensions of emergency orders by the Lieutenant Governor in Council related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the rationale for those extensions. Here today, we have the Minister of Legislative Affairs and House leader, Minister Paul Calandra. He has been designated by the Premier, and he's here with us today to provide this committee with that report.

Per the motion, this committee is empowered to meet as follows: up to 30 minutes for the Premier or his designates to make an opening statement; up to 60 minutes for the members of the recognized parties to pose questions to the Premier or his designates in three rounds of 10 minutes for each party; and up to 10 minutes for the independent member to pose questions of the Premier or his designates in two rounds of five minutes each.

Following the minister's opening remarks, we will proceed in the question rotation as we always have since we started meeting, colleagues. The first round will be 10 minutes to the official opposition, 10 minutes to the government and five minutes to the independent member. The second round will be identical: 10 minutes to the official opposition, 10 minutes to the government and five minutes to the independent member. The third round will be 10 minutes to the official opposition and 10 minutes to the government. Are there any further questions before we begin?

Seeing none, Minister Calandra, you certainly may proceed, sir, with your introductory comments. Welcome to this committee.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. Let me just begin by saying how nice it is to see you back in the chair, and of course, I thank our colleague Tom Rakocevic for the great work he did in your absence.

Again, colleagues, thank you. I am pleased to join you today as the Premier's designate for the 20th meeting of the select committee.

We have reached a critical point in the COVID-19 timeline. Evidence suggests that the Omicron variant peaked around early January. Workplaces hit by illness due to COVID-19 across all sectors are getting back on their feet as more employees return to work. Non-emergency surgeries are being rescheduled, and the temporary restrictions imposed in early January to protect against the Omicron variant are being eased gradually, with more restrictions expected to be lifted over the coming weeks. I'm particularly pleased to share that temporary restrictions at long-term-care homes across the province are being eased. Residents will soon be able to have more visitors in the home and can now resume day trips and appoint a greater number of caregivers.

Still, we must approach any end phase of the pandemic with caution. Despite all of the best planning, COVID-19 has knocked the world off course in the past. We are doing

all that we can across government to prevent it from doing so again in the future.

As the data shows, overall virus-related hospital admissions and ICU occupancy capacity seem to have plateaued. As well, we know that the impacts of Omicron on human health are less severe than the Delta variant, and hospital stays are shorter.

But a bed taken up by a COVID patient is one bed less available for somebody with a non-COVID illness. The number of new cases resulting in hospitalization is expected to increase as more restrictions are lifted and friends and families come together, which is why orders under the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020, along with other tools to limit the spread of the virus, must remain in place for the immediate future.

Even so, there is room for cautious optimism. Think about where we were in February 2021 compared to where we are today. We met 2021 under a second provincial declaration of emergency under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. Hospitals—and especially ICUs, colleagues—were close to bursting at the seams. Ontario was placed under a stay-at-home order. Doors to some businesses were locked. Classrooms were disrupted. As we all know, in-class learning was suspended before spring break, and students would not return to school until after Labour Day.

We know what drove the change to get us here today: vaccines and the willingness of Team Ontario to roll up its sleeves for first and second doses as well as boosters in greater numbers than almost any jurisdiction in the world. One year ago, Ontario had access to several vaccines for adults 18-plus. Today, the arsenal to combat COVID-19 has expanded to include a pediatric vaccine for children aged five to 17 and Paxlovid, Ontario's first oral COVID-19 treatment. This antiviral pill can be administered at home to adults 18 or older who are positive for COVID-19 and are experiencing severe symptoms. Ontario's inventory of Paxlovid is limited at this time, but we are expecting increased deliveries from the federal government of the pill in the weeks ahead.

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Then there is news out of the United States that Pfizer has applied to the Food and Drug Administration for emergency authorization for a two-dose version of a COVID-19 vaccine for children six months to five years. I expect Health Canada will apply its own rigorous testing to this vaccine in the months ahead.

Chair, it has been a long two years. We are all tired of COVID-19 and we are all frustrated, especially our health care workers and front-line responders. COVID fatigue is COVID's friend, with the potential for future spread. We cannot afford to let our guard down now. We have come so far. With spring on the horizon and a seasonal shift to outdoor activities and social gatherings, we know that the virus will be with us for a while longer, and we must transition from where we are now to learning to live with COVID-19 in order to get on with our lives more freely. Ontario is well positioned to make the pivot to living with

COVID-19, but living with COVID does not mean we stop protecting ourselves against it.

As I noted earlier, Ontario has one of the highest levels of vaccination in the world. Just under 90% of Ontarians aged 12 and up are fully vaccinated and just under a quarter of children aged five to 11 years old are also fully vaccinated. We expect that we will soon have a vaccine for every age group over six months and, in the future, treatments such as boosters for specific variants.

In the meantime, our government will continue to work with public health officials to get vaccinations into people's arms, to remove restrictions cautiously and to maintain those ROA orders that are helping keep Ontarians safe.

I thank you for your time and, of course, I'm available to take any questions, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Thank you very much, Mr. Calandra. Obviously, we have a little bit of extra time here right now, based on your presentation. I very much appreciate it.

So, we will go directly now to 10 minutes to the official opposition. We have Mr. Harden—yes, I see you're up, sir. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you, Minister Calandra, for being with us this morning, for that report. As you know, something really important for the work of this committee is monitoring our preparedness and our resilience. I appreciated your comments about strategy for the province with respect to this pandemic we're living in.

Everyone knows, not just in our province but around the world, that we've got some residents of our province who have taken their frustration and their anxiety, which you were talking about in your remarks, to the streets. I'm in the city right now, where it's day 14 of over 500 vehicles, including large tractor-trailers and personal vehicles, parked in our streets with enormous impacts. It's truly hard, Minister, to describe the anxiety and the stress that people have been living under.

I know folks in this convoy came to our city to voice their point of view, which is their right. We live in a democracy and people absolutely have the right—on the work of this committee, on COVID-19—to voice their point of view, but, as the Premier has said himself, this has turned into an occupation of our city. This has flummoxed our security officials, who have never seen something like this before—I've talked to them on a regular basis—in 30 years. And I have been troubled, to be honest, about the lack of provincial legislative action.

I know it is not the role of the Premier or me or any member of provincial Parliament to direct the work of police or security officials, but I'm wondering, sir, if you have any comment around—because this is an instance of emergency preparedness with respect to the pandemic. I'm wondering why the province hasn't taken action to restrict or cancel occupational licences for these convoy tractor-trailers or personal vehicles that have been parked in our streets for 14 days, or action on the insurance policies. These are things that security officials have asked me to raise with you. These are powers the Premier could

exercise right away to make sure folks knew that the right to protest and the right to expression does not include the right to gridlock our city.

Through you, Chair, I'm wondering if the minister can inform us and inform the residents of Ottawa when we can expect some action to ensure that vehicles that are currently engaged in unlawful activity—abrogating their licensing and insurance agreements—can have consequences to that.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Minister Calandra, please go ahead.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you very much. First, let me just say this, Joel: Obviously, you know that I know the city of Ottawa very well. I certainly know the area of the city that has been on lockdown because of the protests. I do truly understand how difficult this must be for the people of that beautiful city, and I understand the hard work that has been done by all local members to facilitate something of a positive nature.

I know it has been mentioned, with respect to using some of the provisions of the Highway Traffic Act to impact what is happening on the ground there—to be clear, the provisions of the Highway Traffic Act were drafted in a fashion for road safety. They weren't drafted in a fashion to impact protests. So there are some concerns that that would not be an effective way to actually handle that.

Having said that, the policing on the ground—as you know, there is OPP on the ground, Ottawa police, RCMP. And I should say that the province moved quickly to deputize the RCMP so that they could also enforce provincial and municipal regulations. They do have the full suite of tools, not only under the Criminal Code of Canada, but under the Highway Traffic Act, to act and take action—but as you said in your comments, of course, not directed by politicians, but supported by the rules and the legislation that are already in place.

Mr. Joel Harden: The other thing I asked—through you, Chair—is with respect to these trucks. Can the minister inform us whether Ministry of Transportation officials ever stopped, inspected or documented some of these Ontario-registered vehicles, whether they be commercial tractor-trailers or personal vehicles? Did that ever happen? I ask because our neighbours in the province of Quebec, when a similar convoy entered into their city, immediately did that, and the convoy left within six hours.

I take what the minister is saying about the Highway Traffic Act implications, but again, the province is the licensee, it is the regulator for licences of commercial activity and personal vehicles. It oversees the insurance industry, and I would have to believe that the policies covering these vehicles have been abrogated a long time ago.

What we need from the province is a strong nudge for consequences. The minister probably knows that what stopped the incessant honking in our city, which in apartment buildings in the downtown was as loud as 84 decibels—that's like having a lawn mower in your apartment building running at full blast. What stopped that was

a citizen-led injunction that the convoy appears to have respected.

So what I'm asking—pleading, actually—is, did the ministry, MTO, take any of these steps to do what the province of Quebec has done, to stop, inspect and document these trucks? And if it hasn't already, could you please do that soon? I'm asking not only on behalf of the residents, but I have daily meetings—and I'll get into this in my next question—with businesses that have lost 10 days of sales, with workers who have been out of a paycheque. There are 3,000 workers at the Rideau Centre who haven't been paid, and the mall is now closed in perpetuity.

This is a crisis, and if the legal injunction got the incessant, incredibly loud, disruptive honking, which has traumatized people, to stop, I think the province could act.

I'm wondering if the minister could inform us: Is the Premier prepared to act around licensing or around insurance? Moving along the topic of the Highway Traffic Act, licensing and insurance are tools we have as legislators. Are we prepared to use them? Because it would seem to me that this convoy is breaking the law, and they're doing it with impunity.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Specific to the question with respect to the Ministry of Transportation, there have been Ministry of Transportation inspectors on the ground as well. In advance of the protests, the Ministry of Transportation was working with the Ottawa police as well as the OPP, whether it was on signage—but also on the safety inspections that you mentioned. They continue to be on the ground there.

We obviously continue to work very closely with the Ottawa Police Service, who are still continuing to lead enforcement issues on the ground. They are the lead organization on that. The OPP have been on the ground in advance of the protests, continue to be on the ground, and will remain, obviously, on the ground in Ottawa for some time to come. We are working to support the Ottawa Police Service in any way that they are asking us to do so.

Again, with respect to measures under the Highway Traffic Act, the police on the ground—including the RCMP, because the province has deputized them—have the ability to enforce rules and regulations under the Highway Traffic Act. But to caution—it's not to repeat, but to caution—that legislation was meant for road safety and not for policing of public order. So that is the difference there. Having said that, they have the authority to use whatever resources they need in order to help bring this to an end.

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The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Okay. Thank you, Minister Calandra. Yes, another question? You have two minutes, please, Joel.

Mr. Joel Harden: I guess what I'm hearing through the House leader, Chair, is there's not any action on the insurance front. That's not an acceptable answer, to be honest, House leader, for the citizens of Ottawa. We need action. It took 13 days for the Premier to contact the Prime Minister directly; that's a statement made from the Premier.

As I understand it, the governmental table that the federal government has convened between the federal government, the provincial government and the municipal government—Solicitor General Jones has missed two of those initial meetings. I understand she's going to be attending the meeting today.

We are really concerned here in Ottawa that the province has not acted vigilantly enough with the powers it has. I've now asked for the third time around the issue of insurance. You have, in your cabinet, an expert on the insurance industry: Finance Minister Bethlenfalvy, who comes out of that sector. I urge you. I urge you—through you, Chair, I urge the House leader to take action against folks who are committing lawlessness. What we're learning here in Ottawa is the only things that would appear to work are financial penalties. It stopped the honking. What we need the province to do is to step in and stop the abrogation of licensing rules and insurance rules.

I want to mention a couple of folks before my time is up. Liv, who is a retail worker at the Rideau Centre, was chased out of her workplace by people walking into the Rideau Centre, asking her—demanding her—to take off her mask. Liv has been out of a paycheque for a week, and 3,000 other workers are in that situation. Chris Lord runs a barbershop in Centretown. He was already suffering and was wondering how he could make February rent with the pandemic, because he can't do beard trims. This has absolutely flummoxed him, Minister.

What I'm urging you to do—Chair, through you to the minister to the Premier: We need financial assistance now to the small businesses and workers impacted. We need that money to flow immediately. I'm making an urgent plea. This is coming from all of our business improvement associations, all the working folks in Ottawa.

Also, to finish, I spent the night last night, Chair, in the lobby of the apartment building, and I stayed there until midnight—

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Time is up, Mr. Harden, please. Close off, please.

Mr. Joel Harden: I'll continue in my five minutes. Am I done, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Yes, sorry.

Mr. Joel Harden: All right. I'll continue in my five minutes.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Thank you very, very kindly. We will now go to the government for the next 10 minutes. Who do we have from the government for 10 minutes? Hand up, please. Yes, I see Mr. Bailey. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Minister Calandra, welcome to the committee today. Good to see you again. I'd like to ask a couple of questions in regard to COVID and the response of the government. Now that we see the COVID wave hopefully peaking, I would like to ask some questions about what that actually means for Ontario's ICUs. Are we seeing a reduction in the ICU occupancy for COVID-related illnesses?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you very much, MPP Bailey. Again, I understand how challenging it is for you on the ground in Sarnia as well.

With respect to your specific question on COVID and hospitalizations and ICUs, look, this has been the challenge for us, really, right from the beginning in the province of Ontario, which has led us to have the types of lockdowns that we have had. Having said that, we took immediate action when Omicron started to hit the province of Ontario. We saw how quickly hospitalizations and ICU capacity started to increase over the initial stages of that, but we are starting to see that, as expected, as we progress through Omicron those hospitalizations are coming down equally as quickly, as is occupancy in our ICUs. So we are getting back that capacity that is so important so that we can begin surgeries again, which is something that I know a lot of us have been concerned with. We've put a significant amount of resources in place to deal with the surgical backlog.

But specific to your question, we are starting to see indicators move in the right direction. We obviously have to be cautious, because we've been down this road before. It is one of the reasons why, even before we were elected, we knew that we had to make certain investments in ICU capacity in the province of Ontario. Never again should this province be brought to its knees because 800 people are in an ICU, and that's what we started to change immediately after being elected. We've increased critical care capacity, ICU capacity in this province. As I just said, we're cautiously optimistic that things are moving in the right direction, but the work isn't done yet.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Chair, I've got a second question, and then I'm going to yield my time to MPP Crawford.

The second question is in regard to the GO-VAXX buses. I know I've had the GO-VAXX bus down here twice to Sarnia-Lambton. They seem to work very well. Can you share how the program has been expanded in recent weeks to the rest of Ontario?

Hon. Paul Calandra: That's a really good question.

I actually had the GO-VAXX bus in my community a couple of weeks ago. It certainly has been very, very well-received across the province of Ontario. I don't have the exact numbers, but thousands of vaccinations have been accommodated through the GO-VAXX bus program. If I'm not mistaken, I believe there are currently six GO-VAXX buses, and we're actually adding an additional bus to the fleet. This is obviously in co-operation with Metrolinx. You're right; it has been wildly successful. And those individuals who have been working with the GO-VAXX buses have done an absolutely spectacular job, have made it easier for people to get life-saving vaccinations. This is something I think we can all be very proud of—and excited by the fact that not only are the current buses on the road doing their good work, but we're adding to the fleet again with the co-operation of Metrolinx.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Back to the government again: Go ahead, please.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: It's good to see you, Minister Calandra.

We all know that in early January the government made some changes and instituted new public health measures with respect to the reopening Ontario act.

Recently, the good news is, we've witnessed a plateauing of cases. They seem to be trending down, seem to be less serious, which is all great news.

So my question is, can Ontarians expect an easing of these regulations in the near future? I know a lot of people are asking, where are we headed as a province right now? Could you give us some insight on that?

Hon. Paul Calandra: There is a lot of reason to be optimistic across the province of Ontario.

As the long-term-care minister—we've started to open up our long-term-care homes for additional visitors. As of the 21st, anybody who is double-vaccinated will be able to visit long-term-care homes as long as they have, of course, the appropriate PPE.

The province is moving in a direction of reducing some of the restrictions, and that is because of the work that has been done to tackle Omicron. Not only have we recently moved to a different phase, where we're having 50% capacity in our restaurants, for example, but so long as indicators keep moving in the direction they are, additional measures will be removed, additional restrictions will be removed. The province is moving in the right direction to have most of the COVID restrictions removed by no later than the middle of March. That's good news.

But if I can say this, MPP Crawford, we're always following the data. We have seen the outbreaks, hospitalization, and ICU capacity really start to come down very, very quickly. We are constantly monitoring that to see what amendments could be made and when they can be made, but always with an eye to caution, to make sure that we remain on track.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: That's great. That's good news to hear. Thank you.

Obviously, in Ontario we're quite pleased with the vaccination uptake in the province. As you mentioned in your speech, we've had a very high vaccination rate relative to other jurisdictions, so that's great news for the province. And that has certainly been the case with respect to long-term-care homes, both for residents and staff.

I wanted to get an update, now that you are the Minister of Long-Term Care, in terms of what is happening more recently in the long-term-care homes. How are vaccinations being delivered? And how are residents and people who are working there ensuring that people are remaining safe at this particular time? Are there any updates you can provide on that?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes. We are at a little over 90% of residents who are not only fully vaccinated but have received a booster, and I believe it's over 83%, close to 85%, of staff who are fully vaccinated and with a booster. So that is really, really good news. But, more than that, I would say it's not just the vaccination; it's the increased investments that we've made in infection prevention and control, working with public health units to ensure that our homes have all of the tools that they need to keep residents safe.

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Again, we're really moving in a good direction in our long-term-care homes as well. We're seeing the instances

of outbreaks both with the residents and with the staff really come down very quickly, and we're also seeing the amount of homes in outbreak following that trajectory.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Two minutes.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I am confident that if we continue to be vigilant, over the next number of weeks we will have even greater access to our loved ones in long-term care.

Not to go on too long, but I'd like, again, just to thank the PSWs, the nurses, the RPNs, all of the staff in long-term-care homes. It has been a challenging two years, and they have come through in spades for us in a way that I don't think any of us could have ever expected given the challenges that they've been faced with.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Absolutely.

Sorry, Chair. How much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): You have a minute 20.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: A minute 20. Okay. I'll end with a short question. I know the government has expanded hospital capacity—a lot of people actually don't recognize that—by approximately 3,100 beds through the pandemic in order to handle this additional capacity that we've needed through COVID. Just in terms of long-term-care homes, can you give us some insight into what has been done to ensure that residents, again, are safe, and what sort of changes have been made to ensure residents are safe and comfortable post-COVID?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Really, on a number of pillars with respect to long-term care, it's about building new and modern facilities, which we have started to do right from day one. But it's also investing in increased staffing so that we can get to that level of four hours of care per resident per day, which means onboarding an additional 27,000 PSWs and nurses and RPNs into the system, and significant funding into infection prevention and control measures. Honestly, too, MPP Crawford, even before the pandemic, the move to Ontario health teams to create a blanket of care in our community I think is also a game-changer going forward.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Thank you very much. The time is up now.

We will now go to the independent member for five minutes, please. Mr. Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much, Minister Calandra, for being here at this meeting. I want to say, and I want to concur with my colleague Joel Harden—I'll ask questions about this later, about the power of administrative penalties, but what I'd like to say right now is that the word "jurisdiction" has become a four-letter word in Ottawa. It will be, soon, in Windsor. What people expect is for everybody to get into the room and solve it. It's everyone's problem, and I'm glad the Solicitor General will be joining in the tripartite meeting. All that stuff is too late.

I would ask you to bring this to the Solicitor General—I've written her—that the message she sent to Ottawa citizens, admonishing the police here in Ottawa and telling

us she was sending 1,500 officers, was not a good way to start. We don't say we're sending 1,500 person-days overseas to peacekeep. We say we sent 300 people or 150. I don't understand why that happened, and it breaks trust.

My colleague Joel Harden is right when he says administrative penalties work. I would say to the minister, respectfully, that the Highway Traffic Act is about public safety and security, and it can be used to ensure that that happens. So it should be happening.

Maybe you can answer this question. I wish the Solicitor General was here, because I really would like to talk to her about Bill 68, which we passed three years ago in March 2019. In the provisions of Bill 68, which is the police services act—I can't remember the exact title—it says that a police services board and the minister can bill for excessive costs for people who organize things like rallies or parades or, in this case, occupations. That act, and that part of the act, is not in force. I think it would be a very effective tool to send a direct message to the organizers, who are getting tons of foreign money coming in. That's not going to solve everything, but what I fail to understand is why that tool is not in force and why we aren't using it right now.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, I certainly acknowledge the challenges that the people of Ottawa are facing. I'm fully aware of that beautiful city and what everybody is going through.

You bring up the organizers. I can say very clearly to the organizers of this that the rule of law and the authority of state will prevail. It's just the way it is. There should be no ambiguity about that.

The ability of the police on the ground, the RCMP, OPP, and the OPS—they do have the tools that they need to manage the situation on the ground, including regulations or administrative penalties under the Highway Traffic Act. We don't direct them to do so—I think you would appreciate that—but they do have those tools to do so. That is why we moved really quickly to deputize the RCMP, so they could do that.

With respect to working closely with Ottawa police: The OPP were on the ground in advance of the protest beginning, as was the Ministry of Transportation. Our law enforcement officials are working directly with the Ottawa Police Service, and have been throughout the entire protest.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): One minute.

Mr. John Fraser: I don't hear an answer on Bill 68, so I think that means no. Maybe you can tell me in the next series of questions.

Tens of thousands of people are losing a paycheque every day now in Windsor and Ottawa. Tens of thousands of people have less money to put food on the table.

Is the government going to use emergency powers to give access to things that we need, like manpower, like the ability in terms of—right now, we can't move the trucks. Tow truck companies won't do that. That's a physical problem.

Hon. Paul Calandra: We have received the request from Ottawa and Windsor. We have approved that moving

forward, and I know that Commissioner Carrique is reviewing that and what additional assets can be provided to the Ottawa Police Service as well as to—

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Thank you, Minister.

We will now go back to the official opposition for 10 minutes. Lisa Gretzky, go ahead, please.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'm going to build on what my colleague MPP Harden has talked about, but related to what is going on here in Windsor.

The minister talked about COVID-19 fatigue, frustration and anxiety, which the people who are currently blockading the largest trade border in the country are saying have led them to do what they're doing.

I do want to point out, though, that it's interesting that MPP Bailey, who is the MPP for Sarnia, who is also being affected by these blockades, didn't ask questions about this. I know it affects his community as well.

It is no secret, with the biggest trade border in Canada, that this has had a huge impact not only here in Windsor but across the entire country and, in fact, across North America. We have auto manufacturing plants that are shut down and workers who are not getting sustainable paycheques. We have companies that have spoken out and said that they will have financial penalties for not being able to get their parts to where they need to go in time and they will lose contracts over this. We have medical supplies and food that are not making it back and forth across the border as needed. We have front-line health care workers who are being impeded from going to work every single day.

I know the minister said that he has talked to the mayor and the chief of police here, or someone has from the government, and I appreciate that. But the people of Windsor want to know specifics on what this government is doing—not the federal government—to enforce the laws. These people are blocking municipal roadways and provincial roadways. The people in my community and the surrounding communities would like the minister to explain exactly what the province is doing in order to help bring an end to this blockade.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Just to be very clear, and I know that you're not suggesting anything otherwise, MPP Bailey and the Solicitor General and a number of us have been—he's been very, very active in helping us better understand what's happening on the ground in his community and relaying information from his mayor to us, to me and to the Solicitor General as well. So he's been very, very active on this as well.

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Look, we have been very forceful with respect to asking the federal government—obviously, international borders and access are the responsibility of the federal government. Having said that, you are correct in that this is having a huge impact on the economy of the province of Ontario and, by extension, the entire Canadian economy. We have, of course, offered the assistance of the OPP in those areas of the province. I know you appreciate that the bridge itself is the responsibility of the federal government, the RCMP and Canadian border services, but we are

providing OPP resources to assist the local community when it has been asked of us.

I reiterate again: We have been talking to the federal government with respect to reopening the borders. I know the RCMP is doing a lot of work and I know the CBSA is doing a lot of work, but you're absolutely right: This is a critical piece of economic infrastructure to the province of Ontario and to Canada, and we have to get this open as soon as possible. I don't disagree with you at all.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: To that, this is affecting local businesses in the area.

Hon. Paul Calandra: A hundred per cent.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: As I said, many of them are coming through a very rough two years. They've just been through a month of, again, trying to pivot—and I can tell you that people down here are sick of hearing the word “pivot,” but they've had to pivot and try to survive without having their businesses open. Workers in auto manufacturing have seen lengthy layoffs due to parts shortages already, and this is affecting their income yet again.

The people down here in Windsor—the businesses and the workers and, frankly, the residents who are being affected by the constant noise and not being able to access roadways in the area of the blockade—are wondering, what is your government going to do to make them whole, to ensure that the businesses have the financial support for the money they are losing because people can't access their businesses because of this blockade? For the workers who are again facing work stoppages and losing income and for the residents who are being affected 24/7 by the noise that is going on in this area—these people want to know what financial support is available to them and are saying that they need it immediately.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you, MPP Gretzky. I do understand that and I know how passionate you and your colleagues have been with respect to the importance of ensuring a vibrant auto sector. I'm not going to get into all of the reasons why and all of the supports we've done in the past, because it's of no consequence right now. People want the border open. We know how important it is. We are starting to see slowdowns in many of our manufacturing plants and, as you very correctly highlighted, just-in-time delivery and the impacts that has on our suppliers. I think you hit the nail on the head.

One of the reasons why we want to make sure this border opens as quickly as possible is to avoid any thought that Canada is not a reliable trade partner, that Ontario is not a reliable trade partner and that we cannot be relied upon to be part of the automotive supply chain. We will continue to very vociferously advocate that that bridge get open as soon as possible and that we avoid any closures on other bridges that are very important.

With respect to supports for businesses, we absolutely understand the challenges that this is placing on small, medium and large job-creators in Windsor, in Ottawa and in Sarnia. We've supported them in the past, and we are looking at other options going forward.

Look, I know that the people who work in the Rideau Centre—these are people who work really hard every

single day. They get up very, very early. These aren't multi-millionaires. They drop their kids off at daycare. They can't afford to be without a paycheque on this. I get it.

Again, I say to the protest organizers—I think we're all in agreement in the sense that people have the right to protest; we get that. But the organizers of this protest, especially what we're seeing in Ottawa—this is not the type of protest that should be supported. I can't say clearly enough to them specifically that rule of law will return and the authority of the state will win out. This is paramount. So I understand and I know full well how aggressive you and your colleagues will continue to be, MPP Gretzky, in ensuring that your community receives the support that it needs. I completely understand that.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'd just like to say to the minister that I appreciate that the government is looking at what supports can be provided in the future, but the people in my community and the people in MPP Harden's community and the people in MPP Bailey's community and in communities across this province that are being affected by it don't need you to be looking at what supports are available in the future; they need support right now. This is a dire situation.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Two minutes.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Having those roadways open is vital to the people in my community and across the entire country, frankly.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, and the ironic thing about this is, by closing these bridges—and if I can just go to the Windsor example for a bit, not to diminish what's happening in Ottawa: The very same people who are closing these bridges are also putting at risk their own livelihoods. If we can't be a part of a productive supply chain, our partners in the United States will find other avenues to ship their goods and to provide resources to their auto manufacturers. So we have to get these bridges opened. We are going to do everything we can to support the Canadian Border Services Agency and the RCMP and the federal government to get the bridge open and to secure other bridges to avoid this type of slowdown.

And I understand what you're saying, MPP Gretzky. We appreciate the need for supports.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): One minute.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'll leave it at that, because I know you have a minute. You might have another question.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'm sorry. How much time is there left, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Just a little less than a minute.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Okay. Thank you.

With respect, Minister, I didn't hear anything about immediate supports for the workers who are losing income because of this. I didn't hear anything about business supports for the businesses that are impacted right this minute. I know that there is a government program that, to my knowledge, from what I'm hearing from businesses, those businesses still can't access. It's not open. The

people in my community would like to know what supports are going to be in place immediately. This is not the first day for us here. This has been going on for multiple days now, so they need support right away. They would like a commitment from the government to address it today, not to look at it for the future.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Five seconds.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I think you're referring to the business support grant, which, I believe, applications opened up for yesterday. That's the \$10,000 grant that you referred to in an earlier question. I understand the new challenges that are being faced by Ottawa and Windsor, absolutely. I understand what you're saying.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Thank you very much.

We will now go to the government for 10 minutes. Who do we have up? Hands up, please. Yes, please go ahead.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you, Minister, for being here today. It's great to have you here. It gives me an opportunity, actually, to ask a couple of questions about long-term care, because you're now holding that portfolio as well.

I just wanted to say, first of all, that I know that MPP Bailey has been very active, working with the Premier and making sure that the Premier has been speaking with and engaged with the mayor of Windsor, Drew Dilkens, and the mayor of Sarnia, Mayor Bradley. Obviously, we all know that these are important initiatives, and it's important to try to resolve these things as quickly as possible.

On to long-term care, which is the thing I'm hearing about most from constituents right now: I know you've mentioned in a couple of your comments already about visitors to long-term care and how the rules are changing with respect to allowing more visits—and visitors, maybe. Perhaps you could just elaborate a bit on that. I know that I have had calls from some people who are not vaccinated, who can't be vaccinated because they have an exemption or whatever, and they're very concerned about when they will be able to visit their loved ones. It's obviously challenging when loved ones have dementia and they don't understand exactly why the visits are not happening. Could you just explain to us what the current status is, what the change is that's coming and what you foresee for the future with respect to long-term-care visits?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I think it has been very clear, especially through Omicron—and before that, through the Delta wave—that vaccines have made a huge difference in our long-term-care homes for staff and for the residents of long-term care.

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We recently made some changes to allow additional visitors into our long-term-care homes, but we're going to continue to be cautious on this. Essential caregivers—we've increased that from two to four visitors. We are going to be reviewing and opening up the sector a little bit more in the future. I believe on the 21st we will allow visitors who are fully vaxxed—meaning two doses—to begin visiting their family and friends in long-term-care homes, hopefully proceeding towards the middle of March

at the latest, where we can allow all visitors back into the homes.

Again, look: That doesn't mean that we're going to drop the rapid testing of visitors in the short term. That has to continue. Masking in the homes is going to continue. Ultimately, we understand; we've seen how the vaccinations and boosters have kept our residents safe. But it's not just that, though. You've been very instrumental, in your role as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health, in helping us get to a point where we better understand how to best tackle the issue and make sure that the homes are safe: infection prevention and control funding, the transition—I know it's not specific to your question, but the transition to the health teams before the pandemic was a game-changer for a lot of communities, that blanket of care that we saw come into effect in the early stages of the pandemic. So, ultimately, yes, we're moving in that direction.

We've also made changes or recommendations to our public health units with respect to outbreak management, to rely more on testing and less on isolation, and to move towards, again, more opportunities to socialize in the homes themselves for the residents. Sorry—a long answer, but an important question. I apologize for that.

Mrs. Robin Martin: That's okay. I'm sure those initiatives are going to be very welcome for the residents and for their families, because obviously it has been very difficult for everybody.

I also wanted to ask where we're at with the important promise of modern, new long-term care in our communities that we had made in the last election—we knew coming in that there was a real lack of long-term-care spaces—and how we're doing on that, adding new long-term-care beds or redeveloping the old ones. In my position as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health, I know how crucial that is to helping us manage the hallway health care issue, because a lot of residents—people who could be in long-term care—are still stuck in hospitals because they don't have a place to go.

Can you just elaborate on how we're doing with respect to the numbers with respect to beds?

Hon. Paul Calandra: As we said, we wanted to bring on board 30,000 new beds into the system and update over 20,000 additional new and upgraded beds. We are well on our way to accomplishing that by our goal, which was to have this all done by 2028, by working very closely with our partners.

It was great to be in Ajax just the other day, honestly, to open up a rapid build: from start to finish, one year to get a long-term-care home built. We are seeing thousands of beds being brought on—really good work by our partners in the long-term-care sector, whether it's our municipal partners, not-for-profit or the profit sector, to make sure that we have beds across the system.

But, as I was reminded after the Ajax announcement by a friend in health care, you can build as many buildings as you want, but without the team, the staff, the nurses, the RPNs, the doctors and everybody else—that's when it becomes a home. I'd be remiss if I didn't say thank you to

them. On that angle of it, we're onboarding thousands of PSWs and nurses on our way to our commitment of four hours of care a day.

So we're well on our way. There's more work to be done, and we're always looking for new partners and more avenues to do it. Thank you for the question.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Fabulous. I think MPP Hogarth has a question.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Go ahead, MPP Hogarth.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you. Congratulations, Minister, on your appointment as the Minister of Long-Term Care. Here in my riding alone, we're really excited that we're going to be seeing an extra 256 new long-term-care beds for our community, which has been a long time coming, so thank you.

And when you are speaking to the long-term-care workers, please pass along our thanks. We try to share that news and thank them for the work they do every day. They really are those front-line workers who really take care of our most vulnerable citizens, so we certainly appreciate the work that they do.

Turning to a different area, more to education: Last meeting, we talked a lot about education and the reopening of schools. I was out on Kipling Avenue the other day talking with some constituents, and one of the moms was concerned. She said, "I want to make sure my kids are in school. That's where they need to be." She does feel very confident that they are safe in the schools, but I'm sure there are other moms out there who have similar concerns or questions and we have put a lot of precautions in place to ensure a safe reopening. I'm just wondering if you can share with all the moms, dads and guardians out there how these plans are unfolding in Ontario schools.

Hon. Paul Calandra: As you know, I have two: one in high school and one in elementary school. I won't say their names, because they'll kill me for saying them. As a parent, I have had the same worries that others have had.

There have been significant resources put into the schools by Minister Lecce, whether it's millions of rapid tests made available to our students, the addition of HEPA filters in every classroom or additional staff, whether cleaning staff or additional teachers. There are so many measures in order to make sure that our schools, students and teachers are safe. That doesn't mean that there aren't going to be challenges in individual schools, but we do have, obviously, the protocols in place to ensure that we can make our students as safe as possible. By and large, these measures, whether it's the masking, sending N95 masks to all of our teachers to wear—look, we're progressing in a good spot to keep our schools open. I think that's where parents want us to be.

Thanks to the hard work of Minister Lecce, we're well on our way to ensuring that our students can be in class and learning, even if on occasion my daughters would rather not get the 6:30 bus in the morning.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Thirty seconds.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Just quickly: You mentioned in your comments that we're all frustrated with COVID

right now, and we agree. You also mentioned that we cannot let our guard down. If you have a couple of last comments, what goes into making further decisions on further relaxation of public health measures at a provincial or a local level?

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): You only have 10 seconds.

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's both, MPP Hogarth; it's both ICU capacity and hospital capacity, and working very closely with the public health units across the province to see where they are at locally.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Thank you, Minister Calandra.

Now we'll go back to the independent member, Mr. Fraser, for five minutes, please.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you, Minister, for being here again. I just want to go back to the word "jurisdiction," because what I am reading, from sources close to the Premier, is that they're saying they were reluctant to throw Justin Trudeau a lifeline, or to own any of this or to get involved. Now, finally, the province is getting involved in a meaningful way.

I think it's very distressing to hear that. It upsets me. I know you believe in the primacy of Parliament. What's happening here, to some of these protesters, to a core group of people, is what is called "sedition." I can't imagine how we'd feel—I would defend Doug Ford's right to be Premier of Ontario, even though I'm not happy with all that he's done and, actually, very unhappy about some things. So it's really distressing to read that.

But we're going forward. There's no sense looking in the rear-view mirror right now; we can do that after. There will be lots of blame to go around, for all of us. I think people are going to be saying, "A pox on all your houses."

Right now, the city of Ottawa has declared a state of emergency. It allows it certain powers. The province can call for a state of emergency. I don't know if you've done it in Windsor yet, but you probably will. The province has the ability to declare a state of emergency in areas of the province, which will then open up further tools and powers, administrative and otherwise, things like access to heavy machinery to move what we have to move. Is the province going to do that? There are tens of thousands of people losing a paycheque every day. Our partners to the south are looking at us like, "You guys have got no control." Are you going to do it?

1100

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, both the mayor of Ottawa and the mayor of Windsor have reached out and asked for additional assistance from the province of Ontario, and we have agreed to that assistance. The commissioner of the OPP is going to work with both the Ottawa Police Service and Windsor to provide whatever support they are needing.

I'll say this with respect to Ottawa: We all agree that people can protest and have their say, but let's be very, very clear that the protest leaders in Ottawa are asking for the overthrow of the government. None of us—it doesn't matter how much we support the constitutional right to

protest—would support what they are talking about. None of us support the violence, none of us support the racist flags, the desecration of the monuments. But I think all of us would say, if you want to have a peaceful process like what's happened in Toronto, we would always support that.

Having said that, I might not necessarily like everything that Prime Minister Trudeau has done, but he won an election and he has the right to govern, full stop, and Parliament has the right to govern. We're guided by what the mayor of Windsor and the mayor of Ottawa have asked with their police services. We're going to continue to work with them to ensure that they have the resources, and with the federal government directly through the CBSA and RCMP, in Windsor and Sarnia.

Mr. John Fraser: I think that, in Ottawa, they have requested that the province make that declaration, so I would urge your government to strongly consider that, because it gives some more powers. Given the argument that we both agree on, the organizers of this protest—I'm going to say this again. It's not a question. I'm just going to repeat it. You have a bill on the books. It's been there for three years. It hasn't been enacted. It's not going to solve everything, but I just think if you're costing tens of thousands of people a paycheque every day, we should be sending you some sort of bill, not just the trucker on the street who's caught up in the motives of some other people who are organizing this. Like I say, it's not going to solve everything, but it's a start.

We've been on this for—the city is on it; all of my colleagues here in Ottawa have been on it, at least all of the colleagues in the centre of the city. I really, for the life of me, just don't understand what's so difficult about that, why somebody just can't answer the question and say, "No, we're not going to do it, because we're not ready." If that's the answer to the question, then that's the answer to the question. Then we can move on. The circular answers that I'm getting on this—not from you, respectfully. I'm not saying that you have the knowledge about that right now. But why don't we get a response of, "No, we can't do that," or—

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Thank you very much. The time is up, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. John Fraser: There we go. Sorry, Chair. Sorry, Minister.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): I appreciate that. Thank you.

Mr. John Fraser: I wasn't trying to run the clock.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): That's all right. You had a few extra seconds. We'll have to take it off you next time, at the next meeting.

Anyway, we'll go on now: 10 minutes to the official opposition. Mrs. Gretzky, you're up, please.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: The first question that I have—and maybe it was explained at the beginning. I apologize if it was and I missed it. I'm just wondering why the Solicitor General is not appearing before the committee today.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Obviously, the mandate of the committee is pandemic response, and the Premier has the

ability to designate who he thinks appropriate at the time. Long-term care is obviously something that's very important. At the same time, Minister Jones, as I'm sure you can all appreciate, is working very closely with our counterparts both in Ottawa and Windsor and federally, coordinating our response and making sure that the OPP have the resources and tools that they need.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I appreciate that answer. I know there were at least two meetings that she did not attend, the trilateral meetings that she did not attend, so it's good to know that perhaps that's what she's engaged in now.

The other question I have is around recalling the Legislature and having the Legislature resume so that we can have debate and discussion and potentially move through any rule changes or any legislation that needs to be done in order to resolve what is going on in Ottawa, in Windsor—and again, it's happening in Sarnia and other areas of the province.

Hon. Paul Calandra: That's another really good question. Obviously, we're monitoring the situation. If that needs to be something that happens—as the Premier said, we're going to do what we have to do to ensure that the economy keeps going and that the rule of law is respected in the province of Ontario. As House leader, I can tell you it is something that I monitor daily. We will be meeting in the very, very near future with the House leader from the official opposition as well as the independents. I don't think we're in a position where we need to do that just yet, if I'm being honest. But we will monitor the situation. If that needs to be the reality, then certainly that's what will happen, and the Premier has been very clear on that as well.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: With respect, Minister, I think the people of Ottawa, who are two weeks into this, and the people of Windsor, who are days into this now, and the businesses and the people impacted by the shutdown of the border would disagree with you that we're not at a point where we should be recalling the Legislature and doing something about it. It's beyond the point of monitoring. It's time for action.

I'm going to hand over the rest of the time to my colleague from Ottawa Centre, MPP Joel Harden.

Mr. Joel Harden: Chair, I'll talk about a few breaking stories, in an attempt to convince my colleague from the government to recall the Legislature immediately.

I want all members of this committee to know that I've seen an update from the Ottawa police that there's an organized attempt, they believe, from convoy protesters to flood our 911 services with vexatious calls. It's happening right now. First responders are being sent to inappropriate or vexatious places, and they're asking for immediate help from the province.

I'm also getting a report from one of the convoy organizers—who I will not name, to disgrace the integrity of this committee; he does not deserve to be named. He has just encouraged convoy protesters to consider convoy circles around public schools in the city of Ottawa to let the kids know, "We're on their side." Schools, as you know, are publicly regulated institutions.

If in fact there is truth to this, I am absolutely insisting that we immediately recall the Legislature to have immediate licensing and insurance penalties for these convoy protesters. It seems to be the only thing that works, as my colleague from Ottawa South said—administrative penalties. If you know you will lose your livelihood because of the way you are harassing residents of the city, hopefully you will stop. I want members of this committee to know that.

I also want you to know that—what I ended on earlier— at the invitation of the residents of a building in Centretown where there was an arson attempt, I sat in the lobby of their building and talked to residents last night, many of whom aren't even in there anymore. They're afraid to live in their own building because, at the moment, buildings in the city of Ottawa, in the province of Ontario—provincially regulated—are not required to put locks on their front doors. This particular building has no lock on its front door or on its other door, and residents of that building, having lived through one arson attempt, are absolutely terrified.

So there are ample reasons—through you, Chair, to the minister—to recall the Legislature immediately, for immediate action on licensing, immediate action on insurance, immediate action on building safety, immediate financial support for all of the recipients of the first two rounds of the COVID-19 support grants. We should be immediately dispensing that money now.

I'm wondering if the minister has a response and if I can rely upon his help—all of us—to recall the Legislature immediately to immediately initiate provincial action to help small businesses, to help residents of Ottawa, and to help people in our city know that the province is on their side.

Hon. Paul Calandra: As I said, first and foremost, I think both communities want to ensure that their communities are safe. I completely understand that. That is, of course, why we work very closely with the Ottawa Police Service, the RCMP, in the context of Ottawa and Windsor, and Canadian border services on the ground there.

Business supports: Yes, there is a business support program. It opens today. It's part of a previous tranche that we announced with respect to closures as a result of Omicron. Will there be more to do? Well, we're going to take a look at that. In discussions with—

Mr. Joel Harden: With respect, what I'm asking is, for all Ottawa recipients of the first two rounds of the COVID-19 small business supports, could that just be implemented right away?

What I'm asking the minister to comment on, through you, Chair, is: Could we have an immediate reconvening of the Legislature, given the alarming situations we've seen in Ottawa and—what I'm trying to inform members of this committee—we are seeing in real time right now?

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I guarantee I'll be going to Zoom meetings later today with small business owners, workers and community members who are begging this government to recall the Legislature right away. Can we please have a recall of the Legislature so we can make sure these issues are debated

imminently and that administrative penalties are brought to bear on this convoy? Yes or no?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, MPP Harden, the tools are in place already for the police both on the Criminal Code and with respect to the Highway Traffic Act, as you were talking about, for them to charge individuals who are involved in the protest. The tools are already there. Again, not to be repetitious, that is why we deputize the RCMP to assist in that type of enforcement. We will continue to monitor the situation. The Solicitor General is working very closely—I see your hand up, so I don't want to—

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Two minutes.

Mr. Joel Harden: I hope to convince you at some point—through the Chair: Chair, I hope to convince the honourable member, soon, to recall the Legislature. It's his prerogative as the House leader of his party. We look to his leadership at moments like this. Our city is suffering. There are threats now, live threats, to our children, in addition to our small businesses. Please give me an excuse to jump in my car and head to Toronto so I can help you pass licensing action, building-security action and immediate small business support action to help people.

Through you, Chair: Please, can we recall the Legislature, Minister?

Hon. Paul Calandra: To be clear, small business supports are going out as part of the Omicron support. The OPP are on the ground and have been on the ground since before the protests began. The Ministry of Transportation has been on the ground since before the pandemic began. We are guided by and working with the Ottawa Police Service, who have not relinquished control over the enforcement of protests to the OPP, nor have they requested that we assume command and control of the site in Ottawa. We will continue to work with them, continue to work with the mayor.

But I think all legislators are on the same page. Again, and I'll say this a million times, there should be no ambiguity. To the organizers themselves—

Mr. Joel Harden: Chair? Sorry. Just briefly, to the honourable member, could he send a message to his own party at the federal level to stop supporting this? Could all caucus members of our Legislature immediately stop supporting this convoy? This is abuse, and the abuse has to stop.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I will leave federal politics to the federal members. I was relieved of that responsibility by the people in 2015.

I will continue to do whatever I can, working with all of my colleagues on all sides of the House, to help bring an end to this in a fashion that I think we can all not only be proud of, but ensuring that, going forward, we always have the tools we need, working with our municipal police friends, to never see this type of protest happen again. That's not to take away from people's right to protest. We all would fight tooth and nail to make sure that we never take that right away—

Mr. Joel Harden: But, Chair, I understand that there's a right to protest—

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): I'm sorry, but the time is up. Thank you very, very kindly for your interjections.

We will now go to the government for 10 minutes. Ms. Skelly, please.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Good morning, Minister. It's nice to see you today. I'd like to congratulate you on your new appointment, and I'd like to thank you for coming to my hometown of Hamilton this week to announce—a very exciting announcement—an additional 747 new long-term-care beds for the city of Hamilton. As you know, that brings the new beds that are in the process of being built in the city of Hamilton to over 1,700.

I'm raising this because in your ministry we have recognized since the pandemic that there has been tremendous neglect because of the previous Liberal government. Under the previous Liberal government, when it came to addressing the needs of residents in our long-term-care facilities and addressing the tsunami of seniors that the province was facing—we all knew we had an aging population and would have to deal with the crisis in our long-term-care homes, and yet under the previous government, very few beds were made.

I'm just going to ask you—I'm sure you are familiar with that—how many beds has our government committed in terms of long-term-care capacity, and what did we see under the previous government?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you for the question. Look, we knew well before the last election that we had to do something about long-term care in the province of Ontario. It was part of a very real challenge, not only in space for seniors but also in hallway health care.

As I remarked when we were in Hamilton along with your mayor, announcing, as you said, the 700 additional beds, there are more new long-term-care beds being built in your community alone than were built across the entire province of Ontario by the two previous Liberal administrations. There is a lot of work to be done, and we have great partners in order to get that work done.

But again, it's not just about the beds, right? We talk about the staffing increases and the four hours of care that we want to get to, but there are other things that people might not necessarily see. We came out of SARS in 2003. Some very important lessons should have been learned from SARS, whether it was infection prevention and control never put in place properly—something that we had to move very, very quickly on as a government.

It's not just the long-term care, if I could say this. It's not just about building long-term care, because, as important as that is, it's about the investments in the health care sector as well. We have enormous investments happening in the Niagara region; in Mississauga, the largest build-out, I think, of hospital capacity in our provincial history; building the additional hospital for Brampton; the additional resources that are being put into Ottawa. It's about getting us—we used to have the economic advantage and the health care advantage. People would come to invest in the province of Ontario because we had top-notch health care. That changed a little bit under the previous administration, and we want to regain that advantage as

part of an economic advantage but also to make sure that we have the highest quality of care, not only for our seniors but for all Ontarians.

And as I said there, congratulations. I was somewhat jealous; you have more long-term care being built in your riding alone—and in the communities surrounding your riding, frankly, and throughout Hamilton—than in some other parts of the province. You've done more and better in Hamilton than was done in the entire province over the last two administrations. I think that speaks loudly of your hard work.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Well, of our hard work. But again, I just think it's such an important number to mention over and over and over again, the number of beds that the previous Liberal administrations built in the province of Ontario, and why the state of the long-term-care sector was in such crisis. Again, can you just share the absolute contrast between what our government is doing and what actually happened under the previous two Liberal governments?

Hon. Paul Calandra: To be clear—look, governments have priorities. I will say this: Governments have priorities, and they set those priorities. I don't appreciate it and I don't think it was good for the province of Ontario, but under the two previous Liberal administrations, their priority wasn't long-term care. Their priority wasn't making investments in health care. They had different priorities. I don't think that they were the right ones, and ultimately, nor did the people of the province of Ontario. But now it is incumbent on us to fix that.

Look, when you build 611 beds across the province of Ontario between 2011 and 2018 under the two previous administrations, that is completely unacceptable. It's not only that there were not enough beds for our seniors, it's about the quality of care in our homes. That's why we're making investments for PSWs, for additional nurses in the homes. Again, it's not just about that; it's about giving our PSWs the opportunity to become RPNs, and RPNs to become nurses, by supporting them in their community to do that with funding. So it is an exciting time, but it's a time that we have to make great progress in a very short period of time. We have great partners who are enabling us to do this.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you. Not only is it neglect on their part, but it's truly shameful.

I want to talk about an announcement that the Minister of Health made yesterday regarding access to rapid tests. Can you explain to those who are watching this morning how we are going to ensure that these tests are distributed to Ontarians right across the province?

Hon. Paul Calandra: We saw before Christmas, and just after, how important it was for people. They really wanted to get access to rapid tests, so we knew we had to move quickly. We were hoping to get, I think, some better co-operation—not better co-operation but better support—from the federal government than we ultimately did, so we moved very quickly on our own.

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We're in the process of providing upwards of five million tests a week and making it readily available across all

communities, in grocery stores and pharmacies, so that you can go get access to a rapid test, because we've seen—as we've been saying; I know the Premier has said it for a long time—that access to rapid testing will help us get out of this once and for all. So over the next eight weeks, there are some five million tests very, very close to home, as I said, in your grocery stores and your local pharmacy, where you visit all the time. They will have access to these tests.

I encourage people to continue to use the rapid tests. We've seen how effective they've been in our educational setting. We've seen how effective it has been in long-term-care homes. Not only are Ontarians vaccinated—to an extent that really, I think, is the envy of the world, frankly—but their willingness to try this, to make sure that they have access to rapid tests to keep each other safe, is something that I think we can be very proud of.

Ms. Donna Skelly: And of course, combined with the continuous push to get vaccines, we will get through this pandemic.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes.

Ms. Donna Skelly: MPP Harden mentioned financial support for small businesses. Of course, our government has been proactive on that front since day one. I know our minister of small business and red tape was certainly very aggressive in not only working with the Minister of Finance to identify funds that would be made available—

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Two minutes.

Ms. Donna Skelly: —but getting the system in place, to ensure that small businesses could access the funds.

Can you share some of the programs that have been made available to our small businesses?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes. In the short time I have: The small business support grant, I think, has been very, very, very helpful across the province. That's not to suggest that it helps businesses to completely recover from all of the challenges that they have faced. I know another tranche of that was opened up yesterday; it's a \$10,000 support.

But on top of that, of course, is the cost of electricity that we have offset and the education taxes that have been offset. There's a whole host of supports really aimed at helping our small and medium job-creators to survive and then thrive as we come out of this.

We're always looking to ensure that we have enough supports in place. You're right: The minister of small business, the Minister of Finance, and the minister of economic development and trade have been seized with this. But going forward, it's about unleashing the opportunity that we know exists in the province of Ontario. We can compete with anybody. That's why we're having thousands of jobs come back to the province of Ontario that were lost.

As MPP Gretzky will say, and as MPP Bailey has constantly been saying, we've got to ensure that the borders remain open, that the bridges remain open, because we can't lose the advantage that we have. We can't appear to not be a reliable partner in the supply chain. We've got a great small, medium and large business sector in this province, and we're going to continue to support them because we need them to thrive, because they are the source of thousands of jobs and billions and billions of dollars of economic activity in the province of Ontario.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Thank you, Minister. Our time is up, colleagues. I would certainly like to thank the minister and all the committee members for your poignant questions and, certainly, your comments put forward to the minister in this meeting as well, particularly during these unprecedented, challenging times in this province of Ontario. Thank you for your serious contributions to this committee.

Minister, you are now excused, and we will pause for a moment before we go into closed session.

Mr. Joel Harden: Pardon me, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Yes?

Mr. Joel Harden: I would like to move a motion of unanimous consent to reopen the Legislature, please, with your permission.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): No, that is not at the purview of this committee. That would, of course, come before the Legislature. If this committee could make that recommendation—I don't believe it has the power to do so. I'll confer with the Clerk, though—one minute.

Mr. Harden, I've been advised by the Clerk that we do not have the power to deal with this issue and your question, but thank you very much. You have one more question?

Mr. Joel Harden: Thank you, Chair. Yes, just a point of order: I would like to move a motion of unanimous consent for this committee to express that point of view to the government, please—a unanimous-consent motion—that the Legislature be reopened, please.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Do we have unanimous consent? Raise your hands if yes. If no, raise your hands. No, we do not have unanimous consent, so we will now move on.

Mr. Joel Harden: I'm disappointed in you, colleagues—very disappointed in you, colleagues.

The Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): That's enough, Mr. Harden, please. You've had your opportunity for comment.

Minister, you are excused, and we will go into closed session shortly.

The committee continued in closed session at 1125.

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