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Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Monday 24 April 2023

Lundi 24 avril 2023

Report continued from volume A. 1709

REDUCING INEFFICIENCIES ACT (INFRASTRUCTURE STATUTE LAW AMENDMENTS), 2023

LOI DE 2023 SUR LA RÉDUCTION DES INEFFICACITÉS (MODIFIANT DES LOIS SUR LES INFRASTRUCTURES)

Continuation of debate on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 69, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to infrastructure / Projet de loi 69, Loi modifiant diverses lois sur les infrastructures.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to stand and speak in the House, and today on Bill 69, Reducing Inefficiencies Act, third reading.

Basically this bill has two schedules: The first schedule is on changes to the Environmental Assessment Act, and the second schedule is on the Ministry of Infrastructure Act and changes to that. I'm going to focus on the Environmental Assessment Act and, if I have some time, I'll go to infrastructure.

Why I'm focusing on the Environmental Assessment Act—what does a farmer know about the Environmental Assessment Act? Well, I shouldn't know anything, because the Minister of the Environment should—when I first got involved with the Environmental Assessment Act, years and years and years ago, I had full faith that the Minister of the Environment had everything under control. I was involved in a big project in my riding for 15 years, for which the government finally passed legislation to stop it, for which I got sued and had to run for provincial politics to get the government to drop the lawsuit.

So forgive me—and at that time, I also had an uncle who was a minister in the government, but it wasn't his fault I got sued. It was my fault, but I brought something up that the Ministry of the Environment didn't want to hear, and neither did the company. It was fully approved, and at the end of the day, the government of the day—not the government that started with the proposal, but the government that was elected after, passed an act specifically to stop that project.

I'm not trying to disparage people who work for the ministry. I'm not disparaging the ministers involved and the people involved—not at all. It's the process, and I'm

not sure that this makes the process any better. Why I say that is that when I was involved—and I don't mind; it's the Adams mine landfill project. When I was involved with that, it seemed that the environmental assessment process wasn't really as concerned about what was actually going to happen as it was concerned about ticking the boxes to get the thing approved.

I always remember things that I find comical. I like comedy, and I will remember that on the Adams mine landfill, there were five pits, but the one is 65 acres across, 600 feet deep, with 300 feet of groundwater. We were on the edge of the pit with the bird expert, because one of the 20 things you have to tick off for an environmental assessment for a landfill is birds. Birds are a very serious issue, especially seagulls in landfills, and especially because seagulls-and I learned this in the environmental assessment project—don't sleep where they eat. They eat at a mega-landfill, and then they go to the nearest big water body to sleep, and in our case that was 65 kilometres away, Lake Timiskaming. So it was pretty important. Although that airport no longer has commercial air service, it's still an airport for Ornge Air. That seagull flyway went right over an open airport, so it was pretty important. Again, I'm not trying to minimize this issue.

So we were on the edge of the pit, and the bird expert again, not disparaging this company—said that seagulls wouldn't be a problem at Adams mine because of the depth of the pit. Well, as the pit filled up with garbage, that would change, but "because of the depth of the pit." There were about 20 people on that site, and there were a couple of old—"old"; they were my age. I'm old now. They were miners who had worked at Adams mine. They didn't know anything about birds either, but they didn't believe the whole hydraulic containment process was going to work at Adams mine, and I maintain they were right. But anyway, they were standing there, and one of them stuck up his hand and said, "Could you tell me what kind of birds those are?" And lo and behold, there was no garbage in the pit, but there were seagulls, so the idea that there weren't going to be any seagulls when it was a landfill was false.

But the biggest issue there was water. It wasn't seagulls. We petitioned the minister, we did all kinds of things and we finally got it stopped, and I got sued and here I am. But at any point the minister could have stepped in. I listened intently to the debate and I listened intently to the Minister of the Environment this morning talk about this bill. And I asked him a question this morning about this bill, because it says that—one of our members said that the waiting period, a 30-day cooling-off period, would

be eliminated. The Minister of the Environment took exception and said that it's not eliminated but this bill allows the minister now to decide whether it's needed or not. So I asked him: What are the parameters on which the minister of the day decides? I didn't really get an answer, and that's important, because if the only parameter is to get infrastructure built faster, I don't think that's good enough.

We want infrastructure built as quickly as possible, but we also want it built better and safe. That's something that I didn't hear. It reminded me of the Adams mine, but it reminded me again—so it must be 20 years later and I've told this story before but I'm going to go there again, because I'm dealing with the Ministry of the Environment again. Just as a recap, in the township of Armstrong there is now a depository for raw human sewage imported from another jurisdiction and spread on farmland in Armstrong township. Everybody seems to be fine with it. There's actually no legislation against that practice. But again, the EA process was flawed. The minister has been involved. He's been—I'm not going to use that pun again. He has taken this issue seriously, but I still question whether the ministry—and how it would work with this bill, because in any type of project there should be a consultation process. In that project, every abutting landowner should have been notified. That's what it says in legislation. That would mean every piece of land around it. That's not what happened.

The two houses across the road were notified because they had mailboxes, so they got a flyer in their mailbox. But all the other landowners around don't have mailboxes; they have post office boxes in Earlton, and nobody stuffed anything in a post office box in Earlton. So right from the start, the consultation process was flawed. Did anyone step in? Nope. They just kept cruising along like everything is fine. Well, if you're going to take consultation seriously, why didn't somebody say, "Wait a second, something went wrong here"? The neighbours didn't find out that this was happening until the—I was going to say a bad word—sewage was being dumped in the pit. That's when the neighbours found out.

They alerted the ministry: "Well, we put it on the EBR." But if the people don't check—you know, if you're living out in the country, the first thing I'd do in the morning isn't check the EBR in case anybody is going to dump human sewage next door. But there was no reaction.

Now, why that's even more important is because if there had been proper consultation, some of the neighbours—even I knew this—would have told them that there's a well on that property. "Have you thought about the well?" The response from the ministry, because they'd talked to the proponent and the consultant who had designed the project: "Oh, there's no well. Nothing to see here"—until we found a well. Then the ministry, with lightning speed, gets the proponent to change the construction of the project because there's a cement floor that runs right into the lagoon, right into the well—got to fix that. So they ripped it apart and they fixed it. It had been like that for a year. Had they had proper consultation, it never would have happened. And then the ministry turns around

and says, "Hey, everything's fine. Look, we acted with lightning speed." Well, no, you didn't consult in the first place. And are they testing that well? No. That well was cut off at the ground so they welded a piece on so that the runoff can't go in it. This is a new project. This isn't 30 years ago. So again, we alert the minister.

1720

Now, can you blame the neighbours and blame me for being slightly skeptical that everything's under control now? Because the one thing that we need and that we all have in northern Ontario, every farmer—and I'm glad the Minister of Mines is here, because he knows this and he appreciates this. In northern Ontario, you need systematic tile drainage to farm. Those are pipes running under the soil, and they drain the water, and it gives you dryer fields, but it also adds a few weeks to your season in northern Ontario. It's great. And the Ontario government helps fund it; that's great, too.

But farmers have been trying to drain their fields for 100 years, and that farm is 100 years old. I will challenge the ministry that they haven't got a clue where those pipes are on that farm. They know where the systematic ones are, maybe, but they haven't got a clue where those pipes are—the legacy pipes under that farm; haven't got a clue. Yet they have two test wells next to the pit, and that is how they measure whether that pit is going to leak. But if that pit leaks, it'll never get to those test wells. It will get to one of those pipes and go right into the gully. Do I know that's happening? No, I don't know that's happening. But they don't know it's not.

That tells me there's something wrong with the process, because it's very obvious that when there's a well there that everybody knew about except the proponent and the landowner and the ministry—everyone else in that neighbourhood knew there was a well there except for those three, oh, and the engineer who designed the site. When those four groups didn't know what everybody else knew, then the ministry should have said, "Whoa, hold it. Something is wrong with this picture," right? But the ministry didn't. The ministry is now saying—and I'm not saying they're wrong, but they can't prove they're right—that everything's under control.

If the neighbours hadn't been so persistent—and a few of the rest of us were that persistent, too. If we hadn't been so persistent, that well to this day would not be identified. There would have been a new, approved human lagoon storage facility with a direct path to a well under this government's watch. This got approved under this government's, this ministry's watch.

Now, that's a mistake. I am not saying that there are not mistakes made. You know what? Every government—we're human. But the fact that the project is just rolling merrily along even though there was a grave problem at the start that should have been identified—can you blame the neighbours? Can you blame the neighbours for not trusting the ministry or, quite frankly, the proponent?

That's why the neighbours are going to the trouble of doing freedom-of-information requests to see exactly if the amount that they're licensed to take is actually what's going in, if there's more or less going in. They're freaked out, and I don't blame them, because they all knew—we

all knew that well was there. We all knew, and when everyone knows except the people who are supposed to do the regulating and enforcement, somebody is not doing their job. That is a piece of infrastructure that, without the neighbours, would have been absolutely unsafe. It was unsafe for a year. I contend it's probably still unsafe, but it was gravely unsafe for over a year.

By taking away another 30 days—"Oh, let's make it quicker"—you're taking away even more chance that somebody will say, "Wait a second, what about that?" Do you know what? When I was building on the farm, I didn't like it when somebody showed up and said, "What about that?" But in the end, when someone shows up and actually identifies something so that you can make the project better, last longer and be safer, those 30 days are a lot less costly than trying to fix it after.

I'll use the example from my lagoon: If the consultation had been done properly, and they'd had to put out leaflets or found out who owned the properties around and actually talked to them, they would have said, "Have you checked the well that was in the milk house?" When I was in that milk house, it even had a hole, because it was solid pipe and when you had to pull the pump you jacked the pipe through the milk house ceiling. Everybody knew, but they didn't bother. They didn't bother. Now if they had bothered, we would have identified that well, that lagoon maybe would have been designed differently, and maybe at the same time they would have really thought about where all the random tile drains are on that farm. Because there is concrete all over that place, and wherever there's concrete, there's drains, there's gravel, there's all kinds of stuff. This was not a new site. Maybe they would have thought, "Meh, not a good idea after all."

And you can't blame this—and I'm not a partisan guy—you can't blame this on the Liberal government or the NDP that supported them from 2011 to 2014. This is on your watch. And this is a little project in a big province. But 20 years ago, when I was involved and that was my landfill, that was the biggest licensed landfill in North America, and it's still sitting there.

And I don't see much has changed. I don't see much has changed: We're still more concerned about ticking boxes than actually doing things right. And this schedule 1 is again kind of "let's make it faster" instead of "let's build it right, make sure it works, make sure it's safe."

We are all here for the same thing. We all want infrastructure in this province, and I do believe we all want it to be as safe as possible. But I'm not sure that waiving that 30-day period is demonstrating that the government is truly sincere. The members here, I believe they're sincere, but I'm not sure that whoever drafted this is truly sincere about making it safer, because 30 days is not going to change the world, but it certainly allows a few extra days for people to identify an issue. Thank you, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions? Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My thanks to the member opposite, the member for Timiskaming-Cochrane, for his participation this afternoon. We come from a similar background, a dairy-farming background—people who want to get things done and want to get them done right so they

don't have to do them again. I appreciate where the member opposite is coming from. I appreciated hearing from him and also his contributions where he said that he's not a partisan, not someone who is partisan in his approach to policy; he wants to see good ideas and wants to make sure those are implemented properly.

My mother always said that no matter who it is, no matter what's brought forward, there's always a way to find something good in everyone and there's always something good you can say about everything. So I'm wondering if, in the spirit of that non-partisanship that the member opposite talked about, where he said that he's not a partisan and he wants to look at the idea on its merits—if there's one good thing in this piece of legislation that he could perhaps say he does like, something that he does think is good about the bill, and if he could share that with the House this afternoon.

1730

Mr. John Vanthof: I appreciate that question. I didn't get to talk about schedule 2. Schedule 2 amalgamates a bunch of real estate holdings and makes it controlled by Infrastructure Ontario. I'm not completely opposed to that. I'm not opposed to that at all, as long as Infrastructure Ontario is doing a good job, and that hasn't been proven either. The idea of consolidating real estate holdings that are going to be managed by one really good management organization is not a bad idea, as long as that management organization is actually up to the job.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions? Mr. Chris Glover: I appreciate the comments. I always listen intently when the member for Timiskaming is speaking in here, and I'd say, if I've got it right, to summarize his comments, it's basically that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure and that you have to listen to local knowledge. When people are making plans for a site, if they don't have the local knowledge, then they're likely to make mistakes and then there are going to be things that have to be done again, or there are going to be some hazards—you were talking about human waste being spread on a farm, where there was a well that nobody knew about. And also about the Adams Mine and an expert coming in and saying, "Oh, the birds aren't going to go in there," and when you got to the site, there were actually birds there.

I'm concerned about Ontario Place, because this government is trying to bypass the requirement for an environmental assessment for the construction of Therme's spa. Is it possible that this could be a big mistake and have huge environmental repercussions that will spill out for future generations?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thanks to my colleague for the question. I think, from my personal experience—I have no personal experience at Ontario Place, except I can remember taking my kids. They had a pool there with little Yamaha outboards. They had bumper boats with Yamaha outboards and little cages. It was fantastic.

But I think every project needs to be looked at for its impact, both good and bad. I think waiving an environmental assessment is a red flag. An environmental assessment shouldn't be a black hole either. There has to be a

process that a proponent can look at and say, "Okay, here's how it has to go," but waiving an environmental assessment is a red flag.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Question? Ms. Christine Hogarth: It's been an interesting debate today. We listened to the minister. We listened to the member opposite. We talked about critical investments in infrastructure. In my riding alone, we have new schools being built. You drive down and you see the walls coming up. It's so exciting. Infrastructure improvements to our hospitals—we're getting things done.

So I'm quite surprised that the members opposite, through you, don't want to get things done, like building a new Ontario Place for this community. But I think that's why our Liberal members have less and less Toronto members: because they did nothing for the city of Toronto. They didn't build transit. They didn't fix up any of the old infrastructure.

So I guess, to our opposition and the MPP who just spoke from Timiskaming, I'm wondering: Why doesn't the opposition want to help us build Ontario?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you very much to the member of the government for that question. I was a bit surprised by it. As the House leader of the official opposition, I can assure you that the official opposition wants to help build Ontario, wants to build Ontario, but we want to build it better and safer, and there's no guarantee from this type of legislation, and based on my experience with Adams mine and now with this human sewage lagoon, that the government has learned any lessons in those 20 years.

We all want the same thing: We want this province to be prosperous. We want people to come here and build their lives here. But they need to do it safely, and if this 30-day waiver is going make the difference, then you've got bigger problems than I thought you did.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Joel Harden: I'm going to give my friend from Timiskaming—Cochrane an opportunity to comment on schedule 2 of the bill, apropos his dialogue with the member from Niagara West.

One of the things I raised with the minister when the minister came to committee was the fact that the goal, as I understand it, is to try to centralize some of these provincially operated buildings. I said to her in discussion at the committee that I was alarmed to find out that there are 812 vacant government of Ontario properties that the people of Ontario are paying to heat, to maintain, and they are not being used. So I said to the minister at committee—and I got a positive response—in a housing and homelessness crisis, at a moment when we need infrastructure to help people, why are we paying for vacant buildings? What is the plan to repurpose at least some of that infrastructure so we can get people temporary housing, temporary reprieve, and help our cities, help our municipalities? To the member, does that sound like a good idea? What do you think?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you very much to the member for that question. So those buildings that are being heated and maintained—I'm from northern Ontario, where it's cold. If you don't heat a building, it's ruined in one year. So that's a reason.

If the government's real goal in this is to have one organization to actually look in depth at doing things like that, do you know what? It wouldn't be a bad idea. But there is no proof in here that that's actually going to be the case either, because Infrastructure Ontario, in some cases, hasn't done the greatest job of what they manage now.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions? I recognize the member for Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Thank you. You made me so nervous that I dropped my pen.

I want to thank the member opposite for his comments. I was certainly very interested to hear how he got into politics and how he got here. I can say, as a former lawyer, I'm quite happy that none of my former clients are members of this House.

My question for the member really ties in to his member's statement this morning, when he talked about the need for infrastructure in the north to improve the road system. The EA provision is discretionary, so I would take it that my colleague opposite would not have any problems if, in order to expedite the construction of much-needed road infrastructure, the minister, in the appropriate circumstances, might look at waiving the EA to get that done faster.

Mr. John Vanthof: That's actually a very good, thoughtful question. It goes back to the question that I asked the minister this morning: What are the parameters of waiving that? And there wasn't a good answer. If the parameter is simply to build a road faster, if that 30 days is the difference between building it and not building it, I think that that's a bit of a stretch. So tell us what the parameters are in the bill.

I would maintain that any big building project or any substantial building project should have a comprehensive EA and that 30 days, based on my experience with the EA process, shouldn't be what breaks the project. If that's what going to break the project, it's pretty feeble in the first place.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): We have time for one quick question and answer.

MPP Jamie West: I'll keep it brief and we might even have time for a response. The member for Timiskaming—Cochrane said that he remembers funny stories, and it reminded me of when I was in Nunavut and we learned the HMS Terror was lost while searching for the Northwest Passage in 1845. They searched for it for nearly two centuries and weren't successful. The reason they weren't successful—it was ultimately found by King William Island. But the people of Nunavut knew that island better as "There is a boat here."

If the member wants to comment on the importance of listening to people who are experts in where they live.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Ten seconds.

Mr. John Vanthof: That is a funny story and sadly true. But going back to my lagoon, the only people in Armstrong township who didn't know there was a well there were the ministry, the proponent, the landowner and the consultant. Everyone else—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): It is now time for further debate.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I appreciate being able to rise at the end of this Monday sitting of the Legislature, where we've had the opportunity to, over the course of the day, in the beginning of the day, begin conversation and debate on important legislation with regard to our education system. We've had the opportunity to vote also on legislation pertaining to our education system. We've had the opportunity to debate housing policy in the afternoon. From the opposition parties, we've had the opportunity to have a motion brought before this House that we could talk about, that we could share about.

1740

And now, we are back to a conversation that I believe is important to the people of my riding and I know is important to the people of so many of our ridings here in the province of Ontario. At the end of the day, we all got here, either over the last day or so or perhaps this morning—perhaps we drove a car, perhaps we took public transit, but we got here in one way, shape or form using public infrastructure. We all understand the importance of public infrastructure in building what we rely upon to use in our everyday life. So many of us go about our days not really thinking too much about whether or not the road we're going to be driving home on is necessarily one that was built quickly or slowly, but we want to ensure that it's built and that it is built well.

We know, of course, that when we go to a hospital, unfortunately, in the situation where perhaps a family member or ourselves need to go to that hospital, we want to make sure there's a hospital built there on time. We want to make sure that we have schools that our children can go to and that some of us went to as well, perhaps, ensuring that we have in place public infrastructure for the public good. I know that that's something all of the members in this House share, and it's something that our constituents expect us to come here and to think about, to discuss and to debate—to debate the way forward on this public infrastructure, to debate the best approaches to this infrastructure. But one of the things I think we can all agree on is the need for that infrastructure.

And so, as the MPP for Niagara West, this afternoon, Madam Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise to speak to how our government is ensuring that that infrastructure gets built, it gets built well, it gets built quickly and it is done in a way that respects the environment, that is efficient and ensures that we are being good stewards of the land that we have been entrusted with as the caretakers of the government for this period of time, at least on this side of the House, and, of course, the collective caretakers of our heritage as Ontarians that all of us as members of the Legislative Assembly have been entrusted with here in this chamber.

I rise today to also acknowledge the hard work that has gone into so much of the infrastructure that in my riding, I know, people are appreciating. Whether it's seeing finally—finally—the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital come to fruition; whether it's seeing new bridges such as the bridge that I had the opportunity to visit just on Friday morning, the O'Reilly's Bridge connecting Pelham and Wainfleet—new, important infrastructure that all levels of government worked towards to ensure that that piece of

infrastructure was built. It's a historic bridge, where the first one was actually built in 1841 and replaced in 1905. It was one of the longest-serving metal truss bridges in Ontario.

But the point of this conversation that we're having this afternoon in relation to our public infrastructure is understanding the importance of streamlining the process, not removing necessary regulation, not reducing necessary guidance and safeguards in place, but ensuring that the ones that are in place aren't onerous, that they're not duplicative, that they're not ones which harm our ability to move forward with these crucial projects that we all rely upon.

Speaker, in that context, I do also want to begin by acknowledging the hard work of the Minister of Infrastructure and her entire team. She has been a consistent friend and ally and advocate.

Interjections.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Absolutely, a round of applause for that minister, for the people of Niagara and, I dare say, for all communities in the province of Ontario.

Since this government came to office in 2018, we have seen some of the largest public infrastructure projects in the history of our region begin to move forward. These are areas like the new west Niagara hospital, the new south Niagara Hospital and twinning of the Garden City Skyway. These are investments in homelessness prevention; they're investments in crucial pieces of infrastructure that each and every one of the residents in the region of Niagara that I have the great honour and privilege of representing rely upon.

And it's under the leadership of the Premier and the Minister of Infrastructure that the government is also investing in a number of local key community infrastructure projects. These are things like municipal roads and bridges, ensuring that the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund was doubled to ensure that our small rural municipalities don't have to pass along the burden of that infrastructure to the municipal ratepayers, but that the provincial government defrays some of those costs to reduce the impact that would otherwise, of course, be borne by property tax holders.

We've also seen commitments to regional transit investments; water and waste water projects; local elementary and secondary schools; community centres and recreational spaces; natural gas expansion; expanding rural broadband and high-speed Internet—and the list goes on and on. Building key community infrastructure was part of our government's pledge to the people of Niagara and this province in 2022, to get shovels in the ground and build Ontario.

Perhaps he won't appreciate me sharing this with the House, but earlier this morning, I did have a brief conversation with the government House leader. He is coming down to Niagara next week to visit some of the exciting expansions of long-term care, at Foyer Richelieu in Welland and also, at the same time, to visit Shalom Manor in Grimsby, which is adding a new campus in Hamilton. He had actually just been down about two weeks ago—it may not have been in the last constituency week, but in the one before—and I said, "Hey, you're coming down to

Niagara again." He said, with a bit of a grudge, I might add, in his tone of voice, "Well, apparently you're getting half the money that's being spent in this province, so I might as well come down and see where it's all going." I think that speaks to the testimony of our government investing in Niagara, when you have the government House leader a little bit bitter that Niagara is getting so much money flowing into every community and understanding the importance of those investments.

At the heart of our government's plan to build, one of the most ambitious in the history of the province, is a capital investment of \$158 billion over the next 10 years. I hope that the member for Niagara Falls listens to this next bit. I hope he looks up and makes sure that he's listening to me when I'm speaking here, because this commitment includes \$20 billion in 2022 and 2023 alone. This is the only plan to include trains, subways and highways. We haven't seen a plan like this come from the opposition.

I know that all members—I come from a region where the good people of Niagara saw fit to return a few of the members opposite from the opposition to this place, but I'll tell you, seeing those members who continually are willing to come out and say it's good that we're getting these investments, it's good that we're getting these projects moving forward, it's great to see all this money being spent in Niagara—I'll tell you, it burns me. I'm too generous by far, because a part of me wants to go out and say that every single one of these projects they voted against.

On the one hand, they come out and they say, "Great, new bridges, more funding for homelessness prevention, more hospitals, more health care, more Skyway expansions," and I see the NDP members from all corners from this province say, "Good. When is it coming to my neck of the woods?" Of course, it's Premier Ford and the government that are spending these important investments to make sure that we're advancing our economy, advancing our province, and yet it seems like they want to have their cake and eat it too. They don't want to support the spending measures to ensure that those investments are made, and yet when it comes back to going back to their community, they're more than willing to crow about how those investments are going to positively impact their community.

So I guess if you're the NDP, you can have your cake and eat it too, but we on this side of the House believe that it's necessary to take the actual, tangible measures that are needed to get those places of infrastructure into place. Our government, for that reason, was re-elected with a bold mandate to build an Ontario for today and for generations to come. It's because our government, in the four years in the lead-up to the last election, understood the importance of not just letting talk be talk, but letting action be action.

We've heard from so many governments over the previous years who talked a good game. We heard a lot from the members of the opposition and the Liberal Party about how much they wanted to continue to invest in Ontario, and yet, when push came to shove, what did we see? We saw a whole lot of nothing. That's what we saw. I'll tell you, in Niagara, just in the last few years alone, I believe we're building some 813 new long-term-care beds

in the Niagara region between Niagara and Hamilton. How many beds were built in the province of Ontario between 2011 and 2016? I'll ask you: How many beds were built? Just 611 beds were built in the entire province from 2011 to 2016, and you know who was in office at that point: It was the NDP-Liberal coalition.

And so, unfortunately, when push came to shove, our government is the one that had to actually go beyond the striking of committees, go beyond the incessant arguing, the incessant partisanship that unfortunately defines so many years here in this place, and we had to get to work and get it done. That's exactly what this legislation does.

Speaker, I think it's fair to say that this legislation, even the title of it—to be very candid, listening to an hour leadoff from both the ministers this morning and from the member this afternoon was definitely in a bit of the weeds. I would say we were in a bit of the minutiae. We definitely saw that the Reducing Inefficiencies Act might not have a title that catches you the way that we've seen from some other titles that were, perhaps, more straight to the point. I know from many people in my riding, I heard a lot of great correspondence from people about building more homes faster—that was something people saw the necessity of, the building more homes faster act, Bill 23. There was a lot of support for that legislation in Niagara and a lot of support from so many corners of this province.

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The Reducing Inefficiencies Act—the title of it might not be something that says, "I'm going to tune in for an hour to listen to a leadoff debate on it." But I'll tell you, it's very important, because this is the nuts and bolts—this is really what coming to this place as a legislator means. It's not just about making those photo ops, and it's not just about having that podium sign in front of you; it's about coming here and doing the nitty-gritty, and it's about sitting down and looking at how we can improve processes, how we can make sure that every dollar that is being spent, every minute that is being spent by the people of this province in bringing forward their ideas, bringing forward their priorities and projects—are being done in an effective way and an efficient way.

So it's not only a privilege to speak to Bill 69 today, as the local member for Niagara West, in the context of our government's commitment to build key infrastructure in our region—although it is also a pleasure in that regard—but it's also a pleasure to speak to Bill 69, in my role as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford as well as the Minister of Infrastructure, the Minister of Red Tape Reduction, and the excellent Minister of the Environment, is taking the lead on streamlining processes and modernizing here in the province of Ontario.

I know that Bill 69 aligns well with the goals of the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction and Minister Parm Gill's efforts to ensure we unleash the economic potential of this great province—that we modernize legislation, regulations and policies; we work across government to reduce barriers and inefficiencies; and we measure and publicly report on how we have made it easier for businesses and individuals to work with government.

And I think that the members opposite will want to listen to this, if they haven't had a chance to yet. I think that the members of the opposition will want to listen up to what I have to say about this.

As my friend and colleague the Minister of Red Tape Reduction has noted, red tape in Ontario remains a significant barrier to economic growth and innovation. It's why I'm pleased today to support the next step in Ontario's plan by passing Bill 69, which, if passed, would cut red tape, would save taxpayers money, would enhance fiscal management, and would boost the economy—all measures that I hope every member in this House would share.

Bill 69 contains two initiatives which are part of this plan. The first proposed initiative, if passed, would help our government streamline the management of realty assets. The second initiative, if passed, would help streamline class environmental assessments, all while ensuring continued strong environmental oversight, something that I know people in my community care greatly about—being home to, of course, the Niagara Escarpment and the unique beauty of the Bruce Trail, a special ecosystem and ecological treasure that exists between the two Great Lakes and the Niagara River.

We also see in this legislation that we are streamlining management of realty assets. As a member of the Legislative Assembly, it's my duty to serve the best interests of my constituents in ensuring that our government—ultimately, their government—operates efficiently and directly. One area where we can achieve these improvements is by streamlining our government's management of real estate and by enhancing fiscal management. Ontario has one of the largest and most complex real estate portfolios in Canada, and it has been working towards establishing a more holistic approach to managing real estate. Currently, there is not a streamlined process to better maintain and manage this real estate, and while this real estate that we hold is one of the government's greatest assets, it's in great need of a holistic approach to decisionmaking and real estate management. That's why by streamlining the province's general real estate portfolio of owned and leased properties, we can sell or lease properties that are no longer needed or not being used to their full potential. This will not only generate revenue for the government but will also create opportunities for private investment as well as economic growth in the local communities where these properties are located.

Speaker, I believe that the government of Ontario has a unique opportunity to improve governance and operate our real estate portfolio more efficiently by creating a framework for centralizing decision-making and management. Bill 69, the Reducing Inefficiencies Act (Infrastructure Statute Law Amendments), 2023, if passed, would establish that initial framework to modify the real estate authorities and 14 entities, and provide the Minister of Infrastructure with control of real property previously under control of the prescribed entities. The 14 entities include: Agricorp; the Education Quality and Accountability Office; the Ontario Arts Council; Ontario Creates;

the Ontario Trillium Foundation; the Ontario Financing Authority; the Fire Marshal's Public Fire Safety Council; Destination Ontario; the Financial Services Regulatory Authority of Ontario; the Ontario Securities Commission; the Human Rights Legal Support Centre; Intellectual Property Ontario; Skilled Trades Ontario; and the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario—14 entities which now will be under the authority of this act to ensure that our government can increase operating and fiscal efficiency.

Speaker, I had the privilege this morning of also being in the chamber when the Minister of the Environment spoke eloquently about the importance of modernizing a process in place for 50 years. That's twice the age I was—I could have been my own age when I was born and still have had the same amount of time between when that particular legislation was first brought forward. Fifty years is far too long to avoid modernizing a process when we know how technology has shifted and changed. The proposed changes will help projects get built faster without compromising environmental standards and protections.

We know that these changes include a results-oriented plan that would provide environmental oversight while reducing delays to getting shovels in the ground on projects which matter most to Ontario communities. We've already taken steps to modernize the environmental assessment program, including in April 2019 releasing a discussion paper with broad themes for modernization as well as implementing modernization recommendations by amending the Environmental Assessment Act through various pieces of Legislature since we have come to office. I know that the proposed changes in this legislation will build on that important work.

It will include providing the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks with the ability to waive or alter the 30-day review period, which will allow projects to begin sooner. The current EA program requires a 30-day review period between when a class environmental assessment is completed and when the proponent may begin project activities. But these will allow, on a more project-specific basis, for the minister to waive or alter the 30-day waiting period.

In conclusion, the proposed changes in this legislation will help streamline the management of realty assets and ensure the people of Ontario, the people who we represent, who are depending on innovative ideas and new approaches to reducing inefficiencies, are not let down. They expect us to be fiscally prudent, to respect taxpayer dollars, to cut red tape and to practise good governance, and this legislation, when passed, I am sure will deliver on those expectations.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Unfortunately, there is very little time left on the clock.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Seeing that there is little time left on the clock, this House now adjourns until 9 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1758.

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ecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
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cott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
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hompson, 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
ibollo, 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
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	Oakville-Nord—Burlington Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
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Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
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