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Mercredi
21 février 2024

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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Wednesday 21 February 2024 / Mercredi 21 février 2024

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Building Infrastructure Safely Act, 2024, Bill 153, Mr. McCarthy / Loi de 2024 sur la construction sécuritaire des infrastructures, projet de loi 153, M. McCarthy

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy.....	7127
Mr. Joel Harden.....	7135
Mr. John Yakabuski.....	7135
Mr. Wayne Gates.....	7135
Mr. Mike Harris.....	7136
Ms. Sandy Shaw.....	7136
Third reading debate deemed adjourned.....	7136

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

Mobile identification clinic in Leeds and Grenville

Mr. Steve Clark.....	7136
----------------------	------

Landlord and Tenant Board

Ms. Doly Begum.....	7137
---------------------	------

Non-Profit Sector Appreciation Week

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy.....	7137
--------------------------------	------

Child care

Ms. Jessica Bell.....	7137
-----------------------	------

GO Transit

Mr. Mike Harris.....	7137
----------------------	------

Fire services in Weenusk First Nation

Mr. Guy Bourgouin.....	7138
------------------------	------

Lunar new year

Mr. Logan Kanapathi.....	7138
--------------------------	------

Government accountability

Ms. Stephanie Bowman.....	7138
---------------------------	------

Palma Pasta

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta.....	7138
-----------------------------------	------

Protests in Toronto

Mrs. Robin Martin.....	7139
------------------------	------

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEUSES ET VISITEURS

Ms. Sandy Shaw.....	7139
Hon. Jill Dunlop.....	7139
Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens.....	7139
Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy.....	7139
Mrs. Lisa Gretzky.....	7139
MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam.....	7139
Mr. Joel Harden.....	7139

Ms. Bhutula Karpoche.....	7139
Miss Monique Taylor.....	7139
Hon. Michael Parsa.....	7139
Mr. Sam Oosterhoff.....	7139
Mr. Jeff Burch.....	7139

Legislative pages

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott).....	7140
------------------------------------	------

QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

Health care

Ms. Marit Stiles.....	7140
Hon. Doug Ford.....	7140
Hon. Sylvia Jones.....	7140

Health care

Ms. Marit Stiles.....	7141
Hon. Sylvia Jones.....	7141
Hon. Doug Ford.....	7141

Northern health care

Mr. Sol Mamakwa.....	7142
Hon. Sylvia Jones.....	7142
Mme France Gélinas.....	7142

Long-term care

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy.....	7143
Hon. Stan Cho.....	7143

Addiction services

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky.....	7143
Hon. Michael A. Tibollo.....	7143

Agri-food industry

Mr. Will Bouma.....	7144
Hon. Lisa M. Thompson.....	7144

Forest industry

MPP Lise Vaugeois.....	7145
Hon. Graydon Smith.....	7145

Health care

Mr. Adil Shamji.....	7145
Hon. Doug Ford.....	7146
Hon. Sylvia Jones.....	7146

Housing

Mr. Sheref Sabawy.....	7146
Hon. Rob Flack.....	7146

Post-secondary education

Ms. Peggy Sattler.....	7147
Hon. Jill Dunlop.....	7147

Oil and gas wells

Mr. Trevor Jones.....	7147
Hon. Graydon Smith.....	7148

Highway safety	
Mr. John Vanthof.....	7148
Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria	7148
Skilled trades	
Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos	7149
Hon. Charmaine A. Williams.....	7149
Visitors	
MPP Jamie West	7149

**INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS /
PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEUSES
ET VISITEURS**

Mme France Gélinas	7150
MPP Jamie West	7150
The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott)	7150

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI**

Massage Therapy Day Act, 2024, Bill 164, Mme Gélinas / Loi de 2024 sur le Jour de la massothérapie, projet de loi 164, Mme Gélinas	
First reading agreed to.....	7150
Mme France Gélinas	7150

**STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES / DÉCLARATIONS
MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES**

Human trafficking / Traite des personnes	
Hon. Michael Parsa	7150
Hon. Michael S. Kerzner.....	7151
Mr. Chris Glover	7152

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Cancer screening	
Mme France Gélinas	7153
School safety	
Mr. Chris Glover	7154
Missing persons	
Miss Monique Taylor.....	7154
Access to health care	
MPP Lise Vaugeois.....	7154

School safety	
Mr. Terence Kernaghan.....	7154
Employment standards	
Ms. Peggy Sattler	7155
Accessibility for persons with disabilities	
Ms. Jessica Bell.....	7155
Health care funding	
Mme France Gélinas	7155
French-language post-secondary education	
MPP Lise Vaugeois.....	7155
Social assistance	
Miss Monique Taylor.....	7156
Alzheimer's disease	
Mr. Terence Kernaghan.....	7156

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Building Infrastructure Safely Act, 2024, Bill 153, Mr. McCarthy / Loi de 2024 sur la construction sécuritaire des infrastructures, projet de loi 153, M. McCarthy	
Ms. Jennifer K. French.....	7156
Hon. Todd J. McCarthy.....	7165
Mr. Terence Kernaghan.....	7165
Ms. Lisa MacLeod.....	7165
Ms. Peggy Sattler	7166
Mr. Mike Harris	7166
Mr. Brian Riddell	7166
Miss Monique Taylor.....	7168
Mr. Andrew Dowie	7168
Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens	7168
Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy	7168
MPP Lise Vaugeois.....	7169
Mr. Anthony Leardi.....	7169
Mr. Chris Glover	7169
Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy	7172
Mr. Terence Kernaghan.....	7172
Mr. Andrew Dowie	7172
MPP Jamie West	7173
Hon. Todd J. McCarthy.....	7173
Mr. Mike Harris	7173
Mr. Sheref Sabawy.....	7173
Third reading debate deemed adjourned	7175

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 21 February 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 21 février 2024

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE SAFELY ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 SUR LA CONSTRUCTION SÉCURITAIRE DES INFRASTRUCTURES

Mr. McCarthy moved third reading of the following bill:
Bill 153, An Act to amend the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012 / Projet de loi 153, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2012 sur un système d'information sur les infrastructures souterraines en Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the minister care to lead off the debate.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: It is a privilege to rise today to lead off third reading debate on the Building Infrastructure Safely Act, 2023. This proposed legislation is a testament to our commitment to building our province in a safer, more efficient and cost-effective manner.

As we kick off this third reading debate, it is my pleasure to reiterate our government's plans for a future marked by progress and prosperity. This legislation, if passed, would create a catalyst for the positive change our province needs. One that ensures that our infrastructure projects are pillars of strength for future generations to come.

Speaker, we frequently debate about infrastructure in this House. We do so because of our government's unwavering commitment to building the vital infrastructure that Ontario needs. It serves as the backbone of a thriving society and the foundation upon which economic growth, job creation and community development are built.

I'm continually reminded of the great work that can be accomplished not just during these debates, but also, last week, at the Standing Committee on Justice Policy—and I will elaborate further on that shortly. I'm always impressed by the thoughtful and careful examination that bills receive in this House. I want to thank all members for their outstanding work in that regard, and I want to thank the representatives from all the organizations who took the time and effort to appear before the Standing Committee on Justice Policy. We heard from the Electricity Distributors Association, the Ontario Energy Association, the Association of Ontario Road Supervisors, the Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association, Enbridge

Gas, Toronto Hydro, Alectra Utilities, Hydro One and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. All of these organizations play an essential role in the daily lives of Ontarians, and one thing was clear: They understand the need for the legislation we are debating this morning.

On behalf of my ministry and our government, we sincerely appreciate the time that all participants have taken to give input. We have thought extensively about what these stakeholders had to say not just during public hearings but also through a series of extensive consultations throughout last year, 2023. These consultations were held by the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery and the Ministry of Energy to listen to the municipalities and the businesses involved in the locate system, to hear from them on ways to improve the system as we work together to build the Ontario of tomorrow. In fact, last spring we hosted round tables with dozens of stakeholders from all areas of the industry, including underground infrastructure owners, excavators and builders.

I want the stakeholders to know that I sincerely appreciate their valuable feedback during the development of this bill, and that I am committed to continuing our conversations as the needs of the industry continue to evolve. The current bill under consideration is a culmination of those consultations, individual meetings, letters and constant communication, wherein stakeholders relay the challenges of the current locate system to the government.

Bill 153 is a response to those concerns and the culmination of these tireless efforts across this government to provide real solutions by way of proposed legislation. That is why Bill 153, I believe, received unanimous support on both its first and second readings. Just yesterday afternoon, it was reported back to the House with unanimous support from the committee.

Speaker, now this brings me to the details of the bill at hand. The Building Infrastructure Safely Act, 2023, aims to prohibit underground infrastructure owners and operators from charging fees to locate essential components such as telecommunication lines, water mains and gas pipelines. This prohibition is a crucial step toward protecting the public from damages to critical infrastructure and keeping costs down for a wide range of construction projects, aligning seamlessly with Ontario's broader plan to facilitate the efficient and safe completion of vital infrastructure projects.

If passed, this bill will play a valuable role in empowering our government's ability to ensure responsible construction practices and community development. That is why today marks a significant milestone in the pursuit of a safer, more efficient and cost-effective approach to

building critical infrastructure in our great province. But more importantly, it is a response to the changing landscape of infrastructure development in Ontario. It demonstrates how our government understands the pivotal role that robust infrastructure plays in connecting communities, fostering innovation and enhancing the overall quality of life for our fellow citizens and residents. We're dedicated to ensuring that these infrastructure projects are not only impactful, but also executed with the highest regard for safety, efficiency and protection of our existing vital underground infrastructure while at the same time keeping costs down.

I submit that it is a particularly timely bill for us to be debating, as people across our province prepare for another construction season starting this spring. Mr. Speaker, the safety of our workers, our citizens and all residents is paramount. Ontarians can rest assured that we are steadfast in our commitment to implementing and upholding the highest safety standards. Our workers are the backbone and future of Ontario, and their well-being is non-negotiable. That is why we will spare no effort in creating the work environments that prioritize safety for them and the communities those workers serve.

Safety also means looking out for our families, our neighbours and the larger community around us. This bill, along with previous amendments to the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012, is aimed at promoting safety. For that matter, it is actually goal number one across my ministry. While we work hard to balance a number of other priorities, safety is always top of mind. Throughout the consultations, for example, strong support has been expressed from the utility sector, as it would provide a system that will ensure the delivery of safe locates with public safety always remaining the top priority.

0910

Efficiency is also one of the keys to unlocking the full potential of our infrastructure initiatives. Our government is acutely aware of the need to streamline processes, eliminate bureaucratic hurdles and foster collaboration among all stakeholders. By aiming to expedite project timelines, reducing unnecessary delays and delivering results, we can meet the evolving needs of our citizens and residents in a timely fashion. Now, to achieve all of these goals, Mr. Speaker, and to have successful infrastructure projects and policies, we continue to work closely with municipalities, private sector partners and community stakeholders.

I believe that many stakeholders agree with the Ontario Good Roads Association, who expressed that our government is delivering on its commitment to improve efficiencies and locate delivery by addressing stakeholder concerns and ensuring an efficient and sustainable operation of Ontario One Call.

Through a thoughtful and collaborative approach, the changes we are proposing would enhance the existing framework and contribute to a more streamlined and effective system for all stakeholders involved. These are the kind of changes that would help improve housing starts

and reduce upward pressure on property taxes throughout the province, especially in northern and rural communities. To reiterate this further, I would like to share a quote from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario: "Timely locates"—according to AMO—"for underground infrastructure are critical for safe and efficient construction. The government's improvements to the locates system will make it more streamlined and accessible, helping municipalities and others to build faster and safer."

Since becoming Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery, this is the second bill I have had the pleasure of introducing to this House. Last fall, I introduced, and this House passed unanimously, Bill 142, which included the new Consumer Protection Act, one of my ministry's cornerstone statutes. Both of these bills were built on extensive consultations in order to find the right solutions for the long term.

In hearings last week of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, I mentioned that we are focused on solutions to get things done the right way. This means a solutions-oriented approach that is going to help move us forward in addressing the challenges faced by underground infrastructure owners, excavators and others who work with the network of cables, pipelines and tunnels that intersect beneath us. We are looking at the solutions that help maintain strong safety standards.

We are also considering the needs and the priorities of numerous stakeholders to arrive at a place that meets the needs of all of those involved. In fact, there have been at least three different rounds of consultations leading up to the introduction of this bill. It is a critical part in every area of my ministry's work as we build better services for the people of Ontario that are easy to access where and when they need them. That is our entire focus. That is the focus on enhancing services for Ontarians and businesses throughout Ontario. It's right there in the name: the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery. This work goes well beyond the walls of my ministry. We help improve government services across the entire government with behind-the-scenes information technology expertise. And not to be forgotten are the archival and record-keeping services and advice provided by the Archives of Ontario in maintaining records of our great history in Ontario.

Speaker, all of this comes back to the bill at hand, because a great deal of my ministry's work is guided by a deep and abiding commitment to protect consumers and ensure public safety. I want to reiterate, and it bears repeating, that just as an accident involving underground infrastructure can extend well beyond the immediate area, getting this work done safely, smoothly and reliably is intrinsically connected to many other government priorities.

As our government is working hard to build infrastructure—infrastructure like new homes, roads, public transit, high-speed Internet—we need to make sure that these projects can be moved along. And while we do not always see the groundwork or, in this case, the underground work

being done before digging starts, we must make sure that locates can facilitate this work getting done and getting done right.

In fact, our Minister of Infrastructure noted that our government is investing over \$185 billion to revitalize schools, hospitals, public transit, roads, housing and access to high-speed Internet for every community across the province by the end of 2025. Speaker, that is the most ambitious capital plan in our province's history. This critical infrastructure will support the quality of life that Ontarians deserve to enjoy. It is what brings us together and keeps us connected to our families, our friends, our workplaces and our daily activities of daily life that are near and dear to us. That is why we are using every tool available to ensure our infrastructure projects are built safely and allow communities, businesses and individuals to feel the benefits of those projects.

The Minister of Infrastructure strongly supports this important work to get these proposed changes in place to get key infrastructure projects built more efficiently, while ensuring communities across Ontario benefit today from these projects and for generations to come. The Minister of Energy also believes that this bill will help keep costs down and make it easier to build more cost-effectively while protecting our workers and the critical underground infrastructure that keeps our province powered and connected. Additionally, excavators and municipalities appreciate our government's work in limiting costs, as when we allow for spiralling costs, it would create challenges for construction companies and, particularly, small municipalities otherwise.

And while the need for infrastructure is clear not just for our current population, it is also essential for future growth, and we have extensive growth expected in the years ahead, within this decade alone. Our population is growing by nearly 500,000 people in the last year. More than 170,000 net new jobs were created in the first nine months of 2023 alone. This is good news; however, it has also created a huge pressure on housing, and that is why the need to work collaboratively to build better, to adapt to our growing population is so important.

Speaker, we have talked much about infrastructure in this House. Our government has been so focused on creating lasting and stable infrastructure that ensures that Ontario can run better. And whether we are talking about building better transit and roads, expanding high-speed Internet availability or getting homes built for our growing population, some of the challenges are the same. You do not have to go very far to hear about many of them. Access to skilled labour, increasing costs and many other construction challenges are all well documented.

Now, before I go any further, allow me to provide you and my colleagues in this House some context, Speaker. There is one area that we tend not to talk about very much, and that is the network of infrastructure that is underground, delivering many of the services that make homes and businesses run. Underneath all of us, beneath our feet, are vast, complicated networks of extremely vital infrastructure that have been built, updated and expanded throughout the history of Ontario.

The water mains, telecommunication cables, gas and oil pipelines and high-voltage electrical cables all fuel the economy of Ontario, and if we want every corner of Ontario to move forward, we need to improve that infrastructure. Every single one of these is critical. They provide necessary services, the loss of which would represent inconvenience at the least or grave danger at the worst.

0920

For example, in today's digital world, having reliable Internet access is crucial for work, education, health care, communication and entertainment. Ontarians understand the frustration when they are left offline and in the dark for too long. Families should never have to worry about their children being unable to access online learning while at home, nor should a business owner have to struggle to work at home due to lack of connectivity. Think of the risk of losing water pressure, which could compromise the ability of firefighters to respond to an emergency. There is really no shortage of practical, real-life examples.

Part of maintaining the reliability of these networks is the requirement to make sure that anyone involved in a construction project gets the necessary information to identify where infrastructure is buried before breaking ground. From planting a tree in your yard to large commercial construction, having a clear knowledge of the vital infrastructure below the site is a must for public safety and for safeguarding the valuable services provided to our communities by our underground assets.

These concerns are not unique to our province. Allow me to share some examples of cases where construction projects have caused significant damage to underground infrastructure.

Just over a year ago, in January 2023, CBC reported a series of interruptions in telecommunications services in northern communities, including in the Northwest Territories. Internet, cellular and phone services were cut off when a construction crew in nearby Norman Wells, only 470 kilometres away, accidentally hit a fibre optic cable. Services were out for two days, and people who needed emergency services were encouraged to drive to their nearest RCMP detachment.

Last October, an entire town of 10,000 people had to be evacuated in Middleton, Idaho, just outside of Boise. This occurred after an excavator ruptured a 22-inch natural gas pipeline. The local fire chief said, "It was a pretty substantial explosion just due to the pressure in that line."

Earlier again in 2023, the New York Times reported on an accident in Frankfurt, Germany. This was of a Deutsche Telekom construction crew, Germany's main telecom provider. It was confirmed that a fibreglass cable buried five metres, or more than 16 feet, underground had been severed by a concrete drill during construction work. This accident took thousands of customers in the greater Frankfurt area offline. It also resulted in nearly 150 cancelled flights and another 247 delayed flights around the world because it knocked out Lufthansa airline's ability to communicate with airports around the world. The result: Thousands of people were stranded in Germany's main travel hub and its largest airport.

Speaker, while these are some large-scale examples, I want to be crystal clear on a couple of things:

(1) We want to ensure that the system works well for individual property owners as well as it does for large commercial projects.

(2) We know that accidents have happened in Ontario before, and we need to put safety precautions in place to prevent them from happening again.

In the examples I just mentioned, I was happy to see that there were no reports of injuries, but it's not hard to see how that could have been quite different.

Of course, as I mentioned earlier, we as a government also must weigh multiple factors. I believe I have covered the safety aspect of things, but the flip side of each story is the service outage. We cannot just say, "Well, as long as no one was hurt, it's all okay." Part of the equation we are continuing to explore and to try to resolve is to maintain the reliability of our underground networks and to make sure that excavators get the necessary information to identify where infrastructure is buried before digging.

It is easy to see how important it is not only for people to call or click before they dig, but also we need that system to work well so that the information can be obtained efficiently and allow the process to work smoothly. This is prevention, and it's an essential aspect of what this bill is about and the improvements that it makes on the existing legislation.

This brings me back to the first and arguably most important part of this bill: that is, to explicitly prohibit owners and operators of underground infrastructure from charging fees to provide locates. The proposed legislation seeks to enshrine into law a free-of-charge locate system mirroring the long-standing industry practice observed across Canada and the United States. This would ensure that projects can be built cost-effectively, while protecting our workers as well as the critical infrastructure below us. This keeps our great province powered and connected. By banning locate fees, we would stem the possibility of a spiralling cycle of costs that would delay the construction of key infrastructure projects and reduce their feasibility.

This legislative change also removes a cost barrier to accessing locates, which should improve public safety, in my submission. Costs associated with the provisioning of locates could encourage individuals or businesses to skirt the locate system and dig without the necessary information to do so safely.

We have heard loudly and clearly from stakeholders like the association of road supervisors of Ontario on their support for this change, both in the interest of public safety and for cost-efficiency. They have all expressed that charging for locates will not simply transfer the cost to the owner or the party requesting the locate. With the administration of these charges, including invoices, payment, collection and processing—all those tasks that would incur additional costs to both the owners of underground infrastructure and excavators—they will likely want to recover themselves by adding to the fees that they charge. All of these added costs simply do not add value to the entire process and would in fact, I submit, undermine the

process. Particularly in an area where staffing is in short supply and municipalities and other organizations are already overburdened, the addition of administrative tasks could potentially create delay, and that delay would affect adversely the timely execution of any locates needed. These delays would, in turn, add further costs to building infrastructure.

Our government is building a stronger Ontario by leading one of the most ambitious capital plans in Ontario's history. This proposed legislation would help make it easier to build the housing, the roads and the public transit for our growing needs. At a time in our history when being more connected, having more affordable homes and improving our transportation options are at the forefront of our province's continued success, making sure this process is cost-effective and working smoothly is in everyone's interest.

These things are not solely about timelines; they are also about predictability and being able to make long-term plans. This is something my ministry has heard from businesses in other areas. Whether it takes three days or three weeks to get something done is not always the point. Obviously, it is usually better to only have to wait for something for only three days, but if you know that it is going to take three weeks, that is a timeline you can plan around and know when you need to have people in place to get things moving.

We have heard, Speaker, from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. The members of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce have expressed support for extending locate delivery timelines for larger projects, specifically phase 1 of our government's proposal, which calls for locates for large projects to be completed within 10 business days. That is to begin in May of this year. We understand that this change would help mitigate some of the challenges we have heard in delivering locates within five business days for all locate requests, regardless of the size and complexity of a project.

As our government moves into phase 2, this would enable opportunities to further differentiate between dig projects based on size. As such, moving to more attainable time frames for locates will also give added visibility to the locate industry to better align resources and to better provide for attention focused on large-scope locates.

0930

A few weeks ago, when Toronto was in the middle of a cold snap—one of the few this year so far—many of you may have driven by construction sites when it was as cold as 22 degrees below zero. Now, it has been a while since we have had temperatures that low, and seeing workers who were digging trenches, laying pipes and running cables in that particular cold snap, it does give us an understanding that you do not want people standing out there, waiting to do that work because they have to wait to get the locates. It's not only frustrating but also expensive, and quite frankly, quite inconvenient.

Another concern we have heard is the spiralling of costs I touched upon earlier. If locates were ever done for a fee before beginning construction, I want to repeat, there is a

long-standing industry practice that now we're explicitly putting into the proposed legislation: a ban on those locate fees. This is a practice that's followed throughout Canada and the United States, but we're taking the legislative lead on enshrining it in law. For example, a local hydro company charging a municipality for locate requests when that hydro company is digging nearby before beginning a new construction project—that fee for the locate would be an additional expense.

Expanding critical infrastructure is a large-scale project. We are not talking about a few backyard fence posts, Speaker. We're talking about underground infrastructure that could stretch over hundreds of kilometres. The cost of those locates could be very significant. By charging that fee, one entity, the hydro company, could recover the costs of the delivery of those locates, meaning the municipality would then have an outstanding expense. So the natural inclination in such circumstances would be that the municipality too would have to charge fees when providing locates that would be later on for the utility companies before their new water mains can go in the ground or be repaired. In fact, it is not just an inclination; it becomes an imperative to recover costs from excavators. So it does not take much imagination to see how this would end where every underground infrastructure owner and operator is charging and being charged to identify infrastructure. Speaker, this is what I do mean by a spiralling cycle of costs. It has ripple effects that would be obvious. That is why the long-standing industry practice was followed. To the extent that there was a concern—and there was a concern—that it may not continue to be followed, we took action with this proposed bill.

In fact and in effect, at some point, in a pay-for-locates system, as you charge one company and then they charge another, those fees simply come back to you when you need to get locates done. These very same underground infrastructure owners and operators who complete locates may themselves need locates done with completing their own infrastructure projects. Underground infrastructure owners and operators have a responsibility to each other. It just makes common and financial sense to maintain the current standard of requiring underground infrastructure owners and operators to complete locates without charging for them. If infrastructure owners and operators do this work without charging fees, there is also a natural motivation to do the work in the most cost-effective manner possible, while protecting their own capital investments in underground infrastructure.

Speaker, this spiral of costs, at some point, would have reached a level of absurdity. But possibly, the bigger risk is what happens on the ground when crews are in place, ready to work. These are the kinds of things we heard from stakeholders when we met with many of them earlier this year and last spring. It raises the question of whether it is possible that digging could begin without locates being done. While I want to think that no crew would take this risk, I could also see a situation where higher costs could create an incentive for someone to cut a corner here or there. Speaker, let me be clear, that is a very dangerous and potentially illegal move.

Our goal is to create legislation that eliminates that possibility. This is a scenario that we can help avoid, and I think it is incumbent upon this House to take steps like this that help put the conditions in place to make the entire locates process smooth, efficient and cost-effective. If we can do things that help move along the process without undue costs to anyone who is digging, I think we owe it to the people of Ontario to make that happen.

Now, Speaker, there are additional measures that this bill would address, and I would also like to speak about these additional measures for just a few minutes. For most people, requesting a locate is a simple enough process. For example, many of us who own a home may have contacted Ontario One Call ourselves to request a locate. This could be for projects like planting a tree or drilling holes to support a new deck.

The process to request a locate is generally quite easy. One simply visits ontarioonecall.ca, fills in the email address and the relevant phone number and then follows the prompts on screen. A few days later, people from utility companies, telecommunications and pipeline owners and operators will mark their infrastructure: red for electrical, blue for potable water, yellow for gas and other pipelines and so on. These are the multicoloured spray-painted lines, or sometimes what we observe as small flags that we see on the ground as we walk past ground that is about to be dug up.

For a homeowner on a small, discrete project, it is usually that simple; however, on a large scale with larger projects and at a system-wide level, matters start to become somewhat more complicated. There is a lot of other work that must go in behind the scenes to get all of these locates done in a timely manner. That is why Ontario One Call, one of 12 administrative authorities under my ministry, has a growing role in helping to make that system work well and to educate the public every step of the way.

Before I get into the additional improvements this bill would make to Ontario One Call, I would like to address for the House some general points about administrative authorities—some call them delegated administrative authorities. While many people think an administrative authority is the same as a government agency, it is not, Speaker. Whereas a government agency is usually controlled by the government, an administrative authority is an independent, not-for-profit corporation that operates within a strong accountability and governance framework. Administrative authorities are designated certain responsibilities by the government in specific sectors and industries to administer and enforce certain Ontario laws, including laws regarding consumer protection and public safety.

Some of these administrative authorities help ensure that certain businesses that Ontarians receive services from are qualified and competent. In fact, Speaker, going back to what I mentioned earlier about the breadth of my ministry's purview, if you use the services of a real estate broker or salesperson, or you live in a condominium, you have benefited from the work of an administrative authority. Also, if you have ever hired a licensed electrical con-

tractor, rode in an elevator or enjoyed a glass of Ontario's VQA wines, you have benefited from the work of one of our administrative authorities—one or more of our administrative authorities in the case of condominiums. And if you have ever hired an Ontario travel agent, bought a car from a motor vehicle dealer or have needed services from a funeral director or a cemetery, you also have benefitted from the mandate of an administrative authority under the authority of my ministry.

These organizations ensure that equipment is properly maintained and that consumers are being educated about their rights when making certain purchases. Government retains its law-making, regulation and oversight roles while giving the administrative authorities responsibility for the daily operations of how to best carry out their mandates, including matters such as licensing, enforcement and other relevant concerns or things or matters. It is our government's responsibility to ensure that they are consistent in the way they work, the powers they have and how those powers are used.

In March 2020, this House, the 42nd Parliament at that time—we are now in the 43rd Parliament of Ontario—passed the Rebuilding Consumer Confidence Act. It had an important role in harmonizing some key accountability, governance and transparency requirements for most administrative authorities.

0940

The Rebuilding Consumer Confidence Act started bringing some much-needed consistency to the way in which administrative authorities work. Strictly speaking, this bill before us today is not technically related to that act. However, it does build on the spirit of that act by proposing changes to help make One Call more consistent with their administrative authority counterparts.

As I said, Ontario One Call is one of 12, and one can compare and contrast the various mandates and powers that each administrative authority has, and in doing so, one can understand some of the aspects of this act that add authority to the Ontario One Call mandate. Better aligning their powers and their responsibilities with other administrative authorities is part of these proposed changes; that is, specifically better aligning Ontario One Call's powers and responsibility with those other AAs is a crucial part of this proposed legislation.

The proposed amendments to the act would also allow the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery to specify additional objects for Ontario One Call. Think of objects as the jobs an administrative authority has been assigned to do by government. This is very similar to the TSSA, another administrative authority. The TSSA is the Technical Standards and Safety Authority. That particular administrative authority is responsible for elevators, for example, and for amusement park rides at Canada's Wonderland, the CNE and other small fairs that we see across the province in the spring, the fall and throughout the year.

Like the TSSA, with respect to its mandate, this proposed bill would give the government the ability and flexibility to expand objects for Ontario One Call in the future and to address evolving needs. It would provide that

some provisions of the Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, 2010, as they relate to member approval of bylaw changes needed to implement ministers' orders would not apply to One Call. As it is presently constituted, One Call needs to get approval from members in order to pass bylaw changes needed to implement ministers' orders.

Some other changes to the One Call act would include protections for the authorities' officials, their officers, directors, employees and agents, from personal liability. That's an important proposal. These are common protections for officials that work in other administrative authorities. I submit, Speaker, it is reasonable for this to be extended to Ontario One Call.

These changes are needed now because One Call is different than it used to be. Not long ago, One Call largely acted as a call centre, taking requests from excavators and relaying them to underground infrastructure owners and operators. As our government is now asking Ontario One Call members to take on more complex work to support the improvement of efficiencies and locate delivery, that requires better systems, backed up by better and sustainable resources. These changes are needed to meet the needs of industry, but more importantly, to meet the needs of Ontario's growing population as we work on our government's priorities.

This is not the first time that this government has made changes to Ontario One Call's governing legislation. In April 2022, near the end of the mandate of the 42nd Parliament of Ontario, important changes were made to the One Call act as part of the Getting Ontario Connected Act, 2022; changes that saw numerous improvements that we are following through on today. For example, the Getting Ontario Connected Act created a dedicated locator model. This was for projects related to broadband Internet expansion projects. This allows a project owner to get all of their locate services done by one locator, rather than waiting on a different locator for each utility or municipality, and that locator does the work for the duration of the project.

It also extended the validity period of locates to help reduce duplicative work and to drive efficiencies. We are continuing this work and we intend to consider further changes in this year, 2024. Duplication was also reduced by allowing contractors working on the same dig site to share locate information. Speaker, these changes are improving the locate delivery system and making the process of obtaining locates much more efficient and, most importantly, they maintain Ontario's strict safety standards—our top priority, to repeat what I said earlier.

This bill would also remove an excavator's ability to seek compensation through the Ontario Land Tribunal against One Call members that fail to provide a locate within the legislated time limit. It is very important to note that the changes passed by the Getting Ontario Connected Act will still hold underground infrastructure owners and operators accountable for completing locates within the time limits. Within the act, it provided Ontario One Call the authority to issue administrative penalties, also known as AMPs or administrative monetary penalties. These

could be administered or issued against non-compliant members and excavators in the industry.

These powers come into effect via a minister's regulation on May 1, 2024, and would enable One Call to transform into a modern regulator with the administrative monetary penalties as an enforcement tool and, as such, maintaining the Ontario Land Tribunal recourse provisions would become redundant or duplicative. My understanding is that the recourse to the Ontario Land Tribunal, while it existed briefly and while it's now going to be phased out if this bill becomes law, was rarely, if at all, used by anyone.

At the same time, Speaker, I want to acknowledge that some One Call members may be apprehensive about administrative penalties. I want them to know that administrative penalties may be and are just one tool, but they are not the only tool intended to encourage compliance. They—administrative monetary penalties—are really a tool of last resort.

Owners and operators of underground infrastructure should find that that is reassuring and would know then that administrative penalties are only one of many tools that One Call has at its disposal to encourage compliance with the law. At the same time, I would also say that excavators should find the results of the changes from the past year quite encouraging.

From January to July 2022, only 45% of locates were completed on time; however, last year, in the period from January to July 2023, approximately 70% of locates were completed on time. This shows a significant improvement, and I believe that our government working with Ontario One Call can help move those improvements along even further.

Now, Speaker, to pick up again on something I mentioned earlier, this is a balanced and reasonable approach that helps get us all toward a common goal.

I would like to highlight a quote in this regard from the president and CEO of Electricity Distributors Association, Teresa Sarkesian. Ms. Sarkesian stated, and I quote:

“Bill 153 equips Ontario One Call with a powerful tool to encourage active compliance. The discretion given to Ontario One Call also allows it to administer a fair compliance process with intention. Ultimately, Bill 153 takes us one step closer to an entirely modernized regime for locating underground infrastructure safely and efficiently.

“The proposed legislation represents a balanced approach that will ensure faster construction times for housing and infrastructure projects, worker safety around high-risk assets (such as underground wires and cables), a reliable and uninterrupted supply of energy to Ontario's families and businesses, and most importantly, respect for customers.”

Speaker, it is clear the province is at a critical juncture in our history. With the continuing use of online services, our need to get better broadband connection to every corner of the province is more important than ever. We simply cannot afford to leave entire communities without access to online services and information because they do not have a connection to high-speed Internet.

0950

Getting more homes built that people can afford and enabling them better ways to get from there to work and everywhere they need to be—these are today's infrastructure challenges. Our government is all in on these and we are making investments that will help make them a reality for the people of Ontario. But to make that happen, we really need to dig in on the issues that are slowing them down.

Before shovels can go into the ground on these projects, we need to make sure that the critical safety steps are taken and followed. As I indicated earlier, the explicit banning of locate fees is part of that because we would not want to see any motivation to skip steps that would compromise safety, and the spiralling cycle of costs associated with locate fees being charged would, I believe, create a grave risk of that. Safety must come first.

I've shared today about some very large-scale accidents with far-reaching consequences, where accidents have created explosions, service outages and stranded travelers. We want to be the government that took forward-looking decisions, rather than the place where the mistakes were made and lessons learned too late. This forward-thinking approach of our government is, I submit, a non-partisan issue. It is why, I believe, at second reading and at committee, this bill received unanimous support from everyone, from all parties, and why I hope and believe that all parties will support this bill unanimously at third-reading vote.

While we have worked hard in the past few years to get that work done faster and more smoothly, it is not enough to sit and admire our work. This rising above partisanship, as it does, must create a sense of urgency. As we build Ontario together, this approach to locates, to efficiently delivered locate processes must be part of building Ontario. It is a key component of our future, and so we must keep moving forward.

More needs to be done to help contain costs, especially at a time when we are seeing inflation, labour shortages and competition from other jurisdictions. But like the Minister of Finance, I was heartened yesterday to see inflation down to 2.9%—an improvement or a lowering of that rate of inflation even beyond our hopes and expectations at the end of last year.

When we look around, for example, at the intense competition to secure new electric vehicle battery facilities, can we afford to be a place where construction is cumbersome and inefficient or potentially unsafe? No, we cannot, I submit. Among all the things to consider, can we afford not to be the best? That is why Ontario would be a leader if these amendments under this proposed bill are passed. I urge the opposition and all parties in this House to support this bill and continue the trend that was begun at second reading and in committee, because we can act together on some initiatives, this being one.

Speaker, by 2041, Ontario's population is expected to grow by 30%. Now is the time to meet the demands of the future. This is why our government has introduced this bill. This is why, by this bill, we are proposing to ensure

that government is nimble and responsive to the needs of the community. That is why I believe that we have support from across the aisle.

With our growth, new and increasing pressure is put on Ontario's infrastructure capacity. We cannot look away from this challenge. We must make the critical investments today to keep up with a growing population. That is why Bill 153, I submit, is so vital: so nothing can stand in the way of Ontario reaching its full potential.

I understand that my colleagues in this House have expressed support in preventing owners and operators of underground infrastructure from imposing fees for locates, and I appreciate that support. Prohibiting infrastructure owners and operators from charging for providing locates maintains this, as I said, long-standing industry practice that locates are and should be provided free of charge to avoid and to stem a cycle of potentially increasing costs that could burden anyone who wants to dig or create incentives to take shortcuts and compromise safety.

At the same time, we must continue putting systems in place that will help the framework for the delivery of locates to keep up with industry needs. That is why we are proposing these important changes to this legislation: so that the administrative authority of Ontario One Call can be more consistent with those 11 other DAAs.

To make it more adaptable to a rapidly changing landscape can help unearth a greater level of potential from industry as a whole, and it is necessary for the more complex role that we are asking One Call to fulfill. Now, while One Call was originally conceived as an organization to route information from people or businesses that are looking to dig to infrastructure owners and operators, that is no longer the case. They are filling an important role to help get all our infrastructure built faster and make the process smoother and more efficient.

Speaker, there are parallels to be drawn between the consumer protection act, Bill 142, that received royal assent at the end of last year and that was recently debated in this House. There are parallels between that act and this Bill 153, and that parallel is one of shared interests. We appropriately named Bill 142, the consumer protection act, the Better for Consumers, Better for Businesses Act, 2023. It's a shared interest in consumer protection shared by consumers and shared by businesses who want to find it easier to comply, because that's good business. And we are all consumers, after all. We all have that shared interest, just as we have a shared interest in building infrastructure efficiently, safely and cost-effectively and just as we have a shared interest in keeping all matters running smoothly, without interruption, without outages and without potentially fatal accidents.

Like consumers and businesses, excavators and infrastructure owners/operators have these shared interests—interests in maintaining safe and reliable networks that get us the services we need when they are needed. We should all do what we can to foster that work and to get it done in the best possible and a safe manner.

To summarize, Speaker, if passed, I believe that this bill would better protect public safety by legislating the long-

standing industry practice of requiring locates to be provided free of charge and to stem that cycle of potentially escalating costs if locate fees were charged. I also believe that this bill, if passed, would support the evolving role of Ontario One Call. The bill would, if passed, provide that expanded authority to align One Call with other administrative authorities.

If passed, and I want to address this point clearly again, the bill would remove the ability for excavators to seek compensation through the OLT, the Ontario Land Tribunal, for delivery of locates past the legislated time limit. Now, this takes away an appeal route, but at the same time, we have balanced with that the administrative monetary penalties as a tool of last resort and other compliance tools in between. At the same time, the reality is, was this a regularly used, or used at all, appeal route? My understanding is it wasn't. So it's a redundant remedy and is being replaced by, I submit, a more effective remedy, with the expanded powers of Ontario One Call and the ability, as a last resort, to impose administrative monetary penalties—as a tool of last resort—and to ensure compliance with this legislation, because, of course, as it's been said many times in this House and outside this House, we must be a jurisdiction, a nation, a province governed by the rule of law. We are ruled not by people but by laws. Ensuring compliance with the law, both with the letter and spirit of the law, is an essential aspect of what we must do. So while this ministry has the oversight, the delegation to administrative authorities to ensure compliance with the law is essential. As of May 1, 2024, underground infrastructure owners and operators can be subject, then, to administrative penalties imposed by One Call in respect to late locates, to be clear.

1000

I conclude by submitting this: Bill 153, unanimously supported thus far, is a testament to our commitment to building our province more safely, more efficiently and more cost-effectively. That is the shared interest of all of the people that every member of the House represents in 124 electoral districts. That is our shared commitment, and that is why I believe this 43rd Parliament should continue the trend of supporting this bill unanimously.

I want to thank all of those who helped us get our work to this stage. Over the past many months, my ministry officials—and I want to thank my deputy minister and her team, in particular, and each and every ministry official who participated in this—have worked so hard on this to make it a priority piece of legislation, to get it close to the finish line, as we are now. I also want to thank the many, many industry leaders and the Ontario One Call staff, who have come together to discuss ways to make the locates system work better.

My grandfather was fond of the saying "Come, let us reason together." I believe that is what has happened in the lead-up to the introduction of this bill and the debate surrounding this bill, a bill that goes above partisanship and is right for the people of Ontario, for the future of Ontario and the need to plan to build the Ontario of tomorrow, today.

Thank you to all the honourable members for their attention to this bill. I strongly encourage all members across this House to support it, for empowering our province to build the infrastructure of tomorrow is a goal that we all stand behind.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): It is now time for questions and answers.

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery for that hour lead on Bill 153. As he mentioned, this has been something we've been looking at in committee, but as legislation evolves we ask questions. That's our job.

I do have a question for the minister. I had occasion, on my route down to Toronto, to talk to some of the great people who work in the gas sector that maintain the pipelines. They're members of Unifor. They told me a few startling things that this legislation doesn't address, and I'm wondering if the minister would be open to amendments.

They told me that Enbridge at the moment is not obliged to let the province of Ontario and its regulatory authorities know about any compromises in its entire gas pipeline infrastructure in the province of Ontario. I was also told that, in the United States, this is a live discussion there, with many countervailing legal suits going on from municipalities concerned, because methane leaks, as the minister said, are extremely dangerous for workers and extremely dangerous for communities.

Is the minister mindful of that, given that he talked about health and safety, about amendments to this bill that would require all operators of underground infrastructure to disclose compromises—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Back to the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I thank the member for the question. It does bring into play an intersection of a number of issues. I submit that municipalities—you mentioned municipalities would have concerns about this. A significant portion of annual locate requests exist to ensure the continued safety and growth of their communities. Sadly, the NDP sees this as an opportunity to try and continue denying Ontarians improved services designed to help them.

I submit that the member should have no fear about that particular concern that he raises. The implication is that—the practice of disclosure is fully addressed by this bill. I have no concerns whatsoever. I see an improvement in safety and efficiency.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions? I recognize the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I recognize you as well.

I want to thank the minister for his one-hour leadoff this morning—which is a challenge sometimes, early in the return back to the session, but a wonderful job. And Minister—Speaker, through you—we all have made it clear through Premier Ford and our government that building is the priority of this government. Ontario must build, and we're going to get it done. This piece of legis-

lation is one of those pieces that is going to help us achieve that goal, and I'm very pleased for you to have brought this forward. Even though sometimes the attempt of the opposition is to stymie us every step of the way, we are steadfast in our goal.

What I'd like to hear maybe from you a bit is just how this is going to make it happen and the little bit of the positive stakeholder reaction to your changes that are going to make it easier for us to achieve that goal of building 1.5 million homes and building the infrastructure that is so badly needed—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Back to the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery for response.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Thank you to the great member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. Speaking of speeches, I know we just passed his 20th anniversary as a member of this House, I believe, and I have listened to many of his speeches, both as a private citizen before I arrived here and also throughout my time here thus far. I always enjoy listening to that member, so I appreciate it. And 60 minutes is a bit of a challenge, I have to say, but I think under the standing orders, that's the maximum unless somebody moved a motion to give me leave to speak longer.

I did not know, as I tabled this bill at first reading, what the outcome would be in terms of support, but I was delighted to see, not only after the consultations that preceded the tabling of this bill but during the committee process and in the debate in this House, how much consensus there is around these improvements. I'm very proud of that, and I thank all those who gave input to show that we're going on the right track.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: It sounds like Unifor has some concerns; maybe you'd like to talk to them.

But this bill addresses challenges we see in the province around infrastructure needs, and I think that's important. However, it's a shame that this government continues to ignore the infrastructure and repair backlog needs of our public schools. The backlog has reached \$17 billion—that's with a B—in Ontario, and that affects schools, our kids right across the province, from Toronto and your riding to Ottawa to Niagara.

So my question is, why is the government allowing our public schools to crumble? That should be the infrastructure goal that we're focusing on today.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I thank the member for the question. This bill, of course, is addressing amendments to a 2012 act and, again, the history of this legislation thus far is a consensus among our stakeholders and among members of this House. But I also want to remind the member that the original incarnation of the bill was the 2012 underground notification system act. That was passed in a minority Parliament that that member joined in 2014 in a by-election—

Mr. Wayne Gates: Wasn't here. Wasn't here.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:—so congratulations to that member on his 10th anniversary in the House. I believe it's 10 years ago. But he arrived near the end of that minority Parliament.

The incarnation of this act in 2012 was also something that was about consensus: safe building of infrastructure.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: It's interesting to hear the member from Niagara Falls say he wasn't here, because the NDP like to talk about all the great Conservative governments that most of us weren't a part of, except for, I think, maybe the member from Oxford and the Speaker. But we're very proud of our past history here in the Legislature and certainly want to be able to celebrate all those good Conservative governments that we've had. The NDP, I think, have only had one shot at government.

Anyways, to the minister: I hear consistently from municipalities and other organizations that are looking at building critical infrastructure here in the province. One of the challenges they have is they put in requests for locates and sometimes it can take weeks for people to show up and paint the lines and look for the underground services. I'm just wondering how this bill will help speed that up. It's good to see us taking a look at red tape and finding out ways that we can build things faster here in the province.

1010

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I thank the member for Kitchener–Conestoga. I always enjoy hearing his contributions to debate in this House and receiving his questions. Also he's a fellow Maple Leafs fan, and they're on a winning streak now—four in row. I suppose tonight we'll find out whether Auston Matthews, in returning to his hometown, will get to number 50—

Mr. Mike Harris: Don't jinx it. Don't jinx it.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: If, but I believe it will come soon.

This is very, very important. It's a very important question, because we are moving the five days to 10 days. We think that's a more reasonable approach. As I indicated in my remarks, the key is to be able to plan. If you can get your answer within three days and you can get it done within 10, that's fine, but the key is to plan. As long as you know it may take a couple of weeks, you can deal with and work around that delay.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I would like to thank the member for his hour speech on this infrastructure bill. But I would like him to address very specifically the fact that it's important that consumers aren't charged for locates and that locates happen quickly. I would like him to address the notion that in the north, “call before you dig,” or One Call, doesn't work. They end up so often with delays and delays. Because it's such a short construction season, they often don't want to get bogged down in that, if they're trying to build in the short period when they actually don't have to compete with the permafrost. One size doesn't necessarily fit all when it comes to Ontario.

How are you going to ensure—how are you going to enforce—that those penalties, when the locates aren't done on time, are actually levied? And what will Ontario One Call be doing with those penalties if they in fact do show some rigour and enforce that?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I appreciate, Speaker, the member's question. It's an important one. It's true that it's not one size fits all in this great province—15.4 million people, at last count. We do have to have some flexibility and nimbleness. We're moving the rule from five days to 10 days; that's number one. Number two: Ontario One Call is having its mandate expire—it cannot be just a mere conduit for location of underground infrastructure. It can't just be that. It has to be more. It also has to have the nimbleness and flexibility to ensure compliance.

It is a shorter digging season in northern Ontario. We have to deal with that. Ontario One Call will have the flexibility of a number of other tools and options short of AMPs, or administrative monetary penalties, to help ensure compliance with the law and the timelines.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Unfortunately, that is all the time for debate.

It is now time for members' statements.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MOBILE IDENTIFICATION CLINIC IN LEEDS AND GRENVILLE

Mr. Steve Clark: Today I rise to recognize staff from several agencies in my riding who recently joined forces to provide a mobile identification clinic for vulnerable and unhoused people in Leeds and Grenville. The clinic was hosted on Valentine's Day at the Lanark, Leeds and Grenville Addictions and Mental Health drop-in centre. Speaker, the results were remarkable. In just two hours, over 30 people were connected with OHIP cards, birth certificates, Ontario ID cards and various federal benefits.

I applaud those who showed real initiative by spearheading this effort: Amber Gilmour and Donna Stratton of Rideau Community Health Services, and Amanda Briell and staff of the east region ServiceOntario. They were supported by representatives from Service Canada and the Canada Revenue Agency.

Creating this one-stop shop in a familiar and comfortable location removed all the barriers to securing identification. It was truly an all-hands-on-deck effort, with the Cooperative Care Centre, community paramedics and other agencies providing support for people in need.

Speaker, it was so successful they're planning another clinic soon and, of course, my office remains committed to supporting this effort.

I'm so proud of these caring and hard-working individuals. Their co-operation, collaboration and innovation have made a life-changing difference for many at-risk people.

LANDLORD AND TENANT BOARD

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, today we're amidst the most severe housing and homelessness crisis in recent memory. Every day, the Premier reiterates his commitment to providing shelter for the people of Ontario, yet year after year, tenants and landlords alike are left waiting for justice.

The backlog at Ontario's Landlord and Tenant Board has ballooned to over 53,000 cases. This backlog is not merely a statistic but is a testament to a system spiralling out of control, as highlighted in the report by Tribunal Watch Ontario. Tenants facing maintenance disputes endure extremely long waits of over 14 months for resolution, while landlords struggling with rent non-payment eviction cases are left hanging for more than a year. This is unacceptable. The report highlights that the root of this issue lies in the politicization of the LTB by the Ontario government, by this Conservative government, favouring political appointments over experienced professionals. Regional centres shuttered under this government have only exacerbated the delays. Every day, my office hears about the profound consequences of this, with individuals bearing significant personal costs: lost housing; poor living conditions for tenants; and significant financial hardships, particularly impacting small landlords.

Speaker, our Ontario NDP colleagues and I are calling on this government to implement much-needed reforms of the LTB suggested by the Ombudsman. It's time to ensure that all Ontarians receive the justice and relief they so desperately need.

NON-PROFIT SECTOR APPRECIATION WEEK

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Last week was Non-Profit Sector Appreciation Week. In honour of this occasion, I kicked off the week by cooking my signature casserole for the community meal at Inn From the Cold. This local non-profit provides emergency shelter, meals, and supportive counselling services to the most vulnerable in our community. It was great to engage with some of the clients, staff and volunteers.

The week continued with a pop-in visit with four great local non-profits—Blue Door Construct, Newmarket Food Pantry, Women's Centre of York Region, and Abuse Hurts—where I had the humble honour to heartily thank their leaders, staff and volunteers for all their work.

On Valentine's Day, I hosted more than 40 of our esteemed Newmarket–Aurora non-profit organizations at an appreciation event, recognizing them as the backbone of our community. What day would be better than Valentine's Day to extend my deepest gratitude and admiration to these incredible people who generously contribute their time, energy, expertise and passion to our community?

In 2023, the government allocated \$5.7 billion to non-profit institutions.

I would like to thank the MPP for Richmond Hill for her leadership in tabling Bill 9 to recognize the third week in February each year as Non-Profit Sector Appreciation Week.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Jessica Bell: Today I'm here to talk about child care. Parents across our riding, across our city, rely on child care. I think of Liz McLaughlin, who works as a nurse at Princess Margaret Hospital. I met her when her child care centre, Carmelite, announced they were closing, forcing her and 175 families to look for new child care options in a city that has very few available.

A typical wait-list is the kind of wait-list that exists at St. Alban's child care. There are over 100 people waiting for a spot at St. Alban's. I asked St. Alban's, "Why don't you just expand to meet the need that is clearly available?" They said, "We're struggling to even survive." Last year, St. Alban's operated at a deficit because the federal-provincial arrangement doesn't allow them to raise child care fees; however, they're not provided with enough money to cover costs. They have lost more staff in the past year than they have lost in the previous 25 because they cannot recruit or keep workers, because wages are too low and housing costs are too expensive in our city, so people are moving and leaving. It is a huge problem.

As the need for child care rises, our child care system is not able to meet the need—or even, in some cases, they're struggling to survive. I worry that the provincial-federal child care program is at risk.

I urge this government to look for real solutions to keep child care a reality in Ontario.

1020

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Mike Harris: It's a pleasure to rise today, and it's very nice to see everyone back at Queen's Park.

Last week, I was thrilled to have Ontario's Minister of Transportation in town to announce progress on Highway 7. While he was in Kitchener, the minister confirmed his full commitment to increasing service frequency on the GO line. Transforming the Kitchener line into a two-way, all-day rapid transit line is a massive undertaking.

Metrolinx has been completing upgrades to the Kitchener GO line since taking ownership of the track between Georgetown in your riding, Mr. Speaker, and Kitchener in 2018. Poor track conditions and several crossings have been improved, leading to shorter travel times. Safety signal improvements have made our roads safer and increased train speeds through Guelph. We replaced the Wilson Street bridge so work on a second track between Wellington Street and Silvercreek Parkway could begin. Looking forward, Metrolinx will be clearing areas to build a new set of dedicated rail tracks along a portion of the line.

The minister mentioned that as negotiations with CN continue, our government continues to take steps to increase service. This could include a morning train from

Toronto to Kitchener on weekdays or increasing weekend GO train service between Kitchener and Toronto.

We are the only party that will invest in transit in Waterloo region. Let's get going, Speaker.

FIRE SERVICES IN WEENUSK FIRST NATION

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: It is with a heavy heart that I want to express my deepest condolences to the family, chief and community following the tragic loss of lives in Weenusk First Nation, sadly again linked to fire preparedness. It saddens me even more deeply that a year ago we were mourning Weenusk in a similar circumstance. The loss of lives in such a preventable tragedy is a stark reminder of the urgent need for action and investment in a central infrastructure in Indigenous communities across our province.

Together in this House, as representatives of all Ontarians, we have a duty to address these pressing issues and work towards meaningful solutions that prioritize the safety, well-being and dignity of all individuals, regardless of their background or location.

I support every request by Weenusk First Nation and First Nations communities in remote areas to receive proper fire equipment and infrastructure. I urge every one of us to work to bring increased funding and resources for those essential infrastructure projects. Let us not wait for another tragedy to bring the help that we are being asked to deliver.

LUNAR NEW YEAR

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Last weekend in my riding of Markham–Thornhill, I had the pleasure of hosting a special event to celebrate the lunar new year alongside my residents and the Asian community.

Thank you to my colleagues Minister Michael Parsa, Minister Stephen Lecce, MPP Lorne Coe and MPP Laura Smith for attending this wonderful event. Our celebrations showcased traditional cultural dances, food and artwork from a diverse range of peoples.

This year, the year of the dragon, holds a profound significance. It means to have the power to turn your life around for the betterment of your community.

Speaker, Markham–Thornhill is the most vibrant and ethnically diverse riding in the province, and these celebrations resonate deeply with my diverse constituents, offering a moment of reflection, gratitude and hope for the year ahead.

I would like to thank the Chinese and Asian communities for sharing your ancient cultures with all of us, as well as your contributions to our economy, society and politics. You are all nation builders. To all, I say Xin Nian Hao. Gong Hay Fat Choy. Happy New Year.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I rise today to share my constituents' concerns regarding broken promises to the

people of Thorncliffe Park. One of the first issues I raised as MPP for Don Valley West involved the location of the Ontario Line maintenance and storage facility. There was no consultation in advance, causing deep strife amongst the community, local businesses and organizations. To add insult to injury, the government promised a community benefits agreement to deliver economic benefits for local residents, many of whom are new immigrants with skills that Ontario needs. So far, this government has not gotten that done—another broken promise by this Premier.

Now, we face a repeat of this debacle for Thorncliffe Park residents. The government did not consult in advance about their decision to build a transit-oriented community there. They simply announced the plan and then had the gall to have Infrastructure Ontario say, "Community input is a key component of IO's TOC program." This government has already released 800 pages of planning documents related to this project and spent who knows how much money without any consultations being done. My constituents are once again being sidelined by this government.

I'm asking that the Minister of Infrastructure sign a community benefits agreement now. Without that, future consultations will be nothing more than a PR exercise.

PALMA PASTA

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Good morning. It is great to be back at Queen's Park with my wonderful colleagues. I was delighted to spend time connecting with my constituents in Mississauga Centre—as many of you did, I'm sure, in your ridings—going door to door to deliver calendars and red lunar new year envelopes, hosting my New Year's levee with beautiful multi-ethnic performances, as well as participating in tours and announcements. Meeting with small businesses was also very important to me.

Small family-owned businesses are the backbone of our economy. One such business in Mississauga Centre I would like to highlight is Palma Pasta. Premier Ford, myself and my Mississauga colleagues had a great time visiting Palma Pasta and seeing their operation up close. I want to congratulate Anthony Petrucci; his wife, Carmela; and their son Noah for running this wonderful and very tasty operation.

Palma Pasta has been in operation since 1985, when Marsilio and Palma Petrucci opened their very first location. I am proud that our government continuously supports small business owners like Palma Pasta, which received a manufacturing grant to modernize and improve operations.

I want to thank Anthony, Carmela, Noah, Filomena and Lori Petrucci and the entire team at Palma Pasta for having us, allowing us to taste their amazing food and for being a vibrant hub of Italian cuisine and culture in our city. Anthony and the whole team at Palma Pasta represent the very best of the entrepreneurial spirit that helps drive our thriving province forward.

Grazie e buon appetito.

PROTESTS IN TORONTO

Mrs. Robin Martin: It's great to be back in the Legislature and to see friends and colleagues again.

Unfortunately, there were some events during the legislative break that left me very concerned.

While many across the province were celebrating Christmas Eve on December 24, this holy day marked the beginning of a particularly challenging period for many people in my area. At least seven times over the following two weeks, demonstrators obstructed a highway overpass causing backups on the busiest part of the 401 and causing blocked access at the 401 and Avenue Road overpass. Protesters waved flags and verbally harassed constituents with abhorrent anti-Semitic remarks. They shamefully targeted the large Jewish population in the area but impacted everyone. Thankfully, the police arrested those who continued to protest after warnings on January 9.

More recently, protesters assembled at Mount Sinai Hospital, which was founded by members of the Jewish community, and were chanting "intifada" and harassing and intimidating health care providers, patients and visitors alike.

Thanks to our democratic institutions and traditions, residents of our province enjoy many rights and freedoms. But our rights and freedoms are understood to be subject to the rights and freedoms of others. No one has the right to do whatever they want, wherever they want, no matter what the consequences are for others. That is not freedom.

Living together in a society requires fundamentally that we obey the laws, listen to police officers who are trying to maintain order and respect others who live in our society. Our rights and freedoms, our peace and prosperity and our democracy depend on it.

1030

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I would like to welcome all the representatives of the ALS Society of Canada here in the House. I particularly want to give a shout-out to Kris Noakes from my riding, who is with the ALS Society. She's also the mother of Fallon Noakes, who was recently a page here in this Legislature. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Today we are celebrating the 2023 Polanyi Prize recipients. This is honouring Dr. John Charles Polanyi, an Ontario trailblazer who was the recipient of the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize in chemistry.

Joining us today are Dr. Tianyi Wang, who is receiving a prize in the field of economic science, and Dr. Elisabeth Prince, receiving a prize in the field of chemistry. Also joining her today is her guest, Elliot Selby. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Today it's my great honour to recognize the Niagara regional councillor Haley Bateman. Thank you for coming today, Haley. I'm looking forward to meeting with you later on today.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I've got three to announce this morning. As parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health, I'd like to introduce Tammy Moore, Kris Noakes, Ray and Diane Freebury, Patsy and Jasmine Ma, and Wade Hall from the ALS Society of Canada to the Legislature. They will be hosting a reception over the lunch hour in rooms 228 and 230.

I'd also like to welcome Michael Feraday, Gilles Lavigne and staff and practitioners from the Registered Massage Therapists' Association of Ontario. They will be hosting a reception in the Legislature dining room at 5 p.m. today.

Finally, I just noticed a councillor from the town of Aurora: Rachel Gilliland. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is my pleasure to welcome the registered massage therapists to Queen's Park, more specifically a special shout-out to my constituent from Windsor West, Brittany Wistuba. Welcome to Queen's Park. I look forward to meeting with you later.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Good morning, Speaker, and good morning, colleagues. I'd like us to welcome Sue Graham-Nutter, who is the chair of AdvantAge Ontario and the CEO of the Re kai Centres in Toronto Centre, very respected long-term-care homes in our community.

Mr. Joel Harden: If I'm not mistaken, I think I see Nikki Porter up there from Epilepsy Ottawa—I do not. Well, you look a lot like Nikki, and God love you, Nikki, if you're watching. Welcome to all the guests here at Queen's Park.

Ms. Bhutila Karpoche: I'd like to give a special shout-out and say thank you to my old intern Olivia Collver, who is spending her last week with us before she moves to the government side. Thank you so much, Olivia.

Miss Monique Taylor: I would like to welcome the Architectural Conservancy of Canada. I had the privilege of meeting with some Hamilton folks this morning. Welcome to the Legislature, Stan Nowak and Shannon Kyles.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I want to introduce Jeff Mole, a constituent of Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill, to the House. Thank you for joining us.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I want to welcome today—they're not actually quite in the chamber but they're making their way through the security to get in here—branch 613, the Welland-Pelham army cadets from Niagara from my riding. You'll see them joining us. They're outstanding young people who are doing a lot in our community, and I want to welcome them to the chamber this morning.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I'd like to welcome Emily McIntosh, and Farrah Grozelle from Women of Ontario Say No; David Arbuckle, executive director, the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario; Haley Bateman, St. Catharines councillor at Niagara region; Jo-Dee Burbach, councillor, city of Stratford; Rachel Gilliland, councillor, town of Aurora; Lindsay Wilson, deputy mayor, town of Ingersoll. I know you had a great press conference this morning with our leader, and I look forward to my meeting with them later today.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): It is now my pleasure to ask our group of pages to assemble for their introductions.

I would ask the members to please join me in welcoming this group of legislative pages: from the riding of Mississauga East–Cooksville, Ella Ali; from the riding of Newmarket–Aurora, Skye Baker; from the riding of Davenport, Matias Biderman; from the riding of Toronto–Danforth, Abigail Hart; from the riding of Spadina–Fort York, Jeremy Kinnear; from the riding of Scarborough–Agincourt, Winifred Lin; from the riding of Willowdale, Niklas Low; from the riding of Don Valley North, Isaac Luo; from the riding of Richmond Hill, Colin Niu; from the riding of Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, Mesapé Nsong; from the riding of Hamilton Centre, Pharoah Opoku-Warner; from the riding of Brampton Centre, Sarah Salman; from the riding of Markham–Stouffville, Mercy Samouel; from the riding of Mississauga–Streetsville, Seyona Shetty; from the riding of Brampton West, Paras Sodhi; from the riding of Whitby, Ellen Sun; from the riding of Mississauga–Erin Mills, James Teng; from the riding of Ajax, Anushga Trivedi; from the riding of Beaches–East York, Charles Wells; and, lastly, from the riding of Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill, Max Wen.

Once again, please join me in welcoming our pages.

Applause.

QUESTION PERIOD

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Speaker. More than two million people in Ontario don't have a family doctor. The College of Family Physicians is projecting that by 2026, a quarter of Ontarians will be without a family doctor.

Doctors across the province have been raising the alarm about the physician shortage, but we have heard nothing from this government about help on the horizon. There is no plan to incentivize family doctors to stay in their practices or any sign of administrative support to ease their burden.

1040

HealthForceOntario data is showing us that in Toronto we are missing 305 family doctors; Ottawa needs 171; Barrie and Muskoka, 118; and Hamilton is short 114 doctors. So my question is to the Premier: How can you ensure continuous care is going to be available for Ontarians when thousands of people are losing their doctors every year?

Hon. Doug Ford: Well, Mr. Speaker, what if I told you there's a place that over 10,000 doctors have registered in the last five years? What if I told you there's an investment of \$110 million to connect 300,000 more patients to primary care teams, that will lead to 78 new and expanded teams, that will connect 98% of a population to a primary

care doc? What if I told you, Mr. Speaker, \$50 billion, and 50 new locations are either getting a new hospital or an expanded hospital? Mr. Speaker, what if I told you there are 80,000 registered nurses here in Ontario that didn't exist five and a half years ago? Mr. Speaker, this place is called Ontario, and we're going to continue building Ontario's health care team.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock.

Members will please take their seats. Order. Order.

Restart the clock. Supplementary question?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, I know they spent millions of taxpayer dollars on those ads, so they want to get their money's worth, but what if I told you there is a province where two million Ontarians cannot find a family doctor and we have a Premier who is not doing his job?

We are very proud to be joined in the House today by steelworkers from the great city of Sault Ste. Marie. They're here to ask for help after 10,000 patients were notified that they're going to lose primary medical care at the Group Health Centre. The centre was founded by steelworkers. They agreed to payroll deductions to build it and to support workers and their families, and it came with an agreement that they would receive health care for the rest of their lives. Now, with those physicians retiring or resigning, there is no one to replace them. That's the reality in the province of Ontario: There is no plan for the founding members or the historical commitment made to them.

So I want to ask the Premier, what is this government doing right now to address the urgent crisis in primary care in Sault Ste. Marie?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The primary care expansion that the Premier just mentioned, those 78 expansions and new—two of them are happening Sault Ste. Marie. We are committed to making sure the people of Sault Ste. Marie and across Ontario have access to primary care, and that is exactly why we have invested \$110 million in expanding 78 primary care teams. Now, I contrast that to a previous Liberal government who actually cut residency positions in the province of Ontario. If they had not cut those residency positions, we would have upwards of 300 physicians practising in the province of Ontario today.

But we won't stop there. We will continue to work with Sault Ste. Marie, with primary care practitioners, with nurse practitioner-led clinics, to make sure that access is there in community.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to be completely clear, and I'm going to go back to the Premier on this again: 10,000 people in northern Ontario are expected to lose primary care by May of this year—10,000 more; 30,000 already lost it—and they're expecting another 6,000 patients to lose care. They're on the brink.

In total, more than a quarter of the population of Sault Ste. Marie is slated to lose access to primary care. That's

unacceptable to me, and it should be unacceptable to this Premier. Speaker, the official opposition NDP is joining steelworkers and retirees in the call for an immediate strategy to recruit and deploy primary care doctors and health care professionals to Sault Ste. Marie and to other communities in northern Ontario deeply impacted.

To the Premier: When will this government commit to the recruitment and retention strategy for health care workers in northern Ontario?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, we started that work in 2018 when we expanded the access to nurses, to nurse practitioners, to physicians, increasing their access to train in the province of Ontario. We also worked with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario to make sure that as people were coming into Ontario and Canada, they were quickly assessed and ultimately approved when appropriate.

The member from Sault Ste. Marie has been working actively with his community to make sure that these patients are getting access. That work started immediately. I don't know where the NDP have been. I can tell you since 2018, when we formed government, that work has been expanding. We will continue to be there for the people of Sault Ste. Marie and everyone in Ontario who wants access to a primary care physician.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Marit Stiles: While we have been standing right here, raising the alarm, this government has been in power for six years, and health care is worse today than it ever has been. That's on you.

Speaker, the steelworkers of the Soo understand the need to protect health care today and into the future. That's why they have suggested immediate solutions that will continue to pay off for years and years to come and include a plan to support internationally trained doctors to practise in this province. They've called for an expert panel as well that's going to help expedite the training and mentoring that's needed to bring doctors to communities like Sault Ste. Marie.

Speaker, these solutions could be implemented immediately. They could have been implemented yesterday if this government had the political will to do so.

To the Premier: Will he stop making excuses and act now to urgently bring doctors to Sault Ste. Marie?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: With the greatest of respect, Speaker, where was the party opposite when we were actually investing, when we were expanding residency positions in the province of Ontario? The opposition voted against it. Where was the opposition standing when we

brought in investments, when we directed the College of Physicians and Surgeons to assess and ultimately license?

We now have, for the first time in the province of Ontario, as-of-right rules that mean if you want to practise in Ontario, you can do that without the red tape of the practice-ready physicians. It's concrete changes that we are making that we are seeing the impact of in our communities. Name me the last time we have expanded multi-disciplinary teams by 78 in the province of Ontario. It's historic.

Those are changes that are going to make a difference in communities like Chapleau, like Sault Ste. Marie, like Timmins, like Sudbury, like Innisfil, like Woodstock. These are communities that are getting expansions, that desperately want access to primary care. We're giving it to them through an investment of \$110 million.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, where are these phantom doctors? Where are these phantom doctors? The people of Sault Ste. Marie would love to know. They would love to know. It is unacceptable. I'm not going to stop asking this until we get an answer from this government.

If these patients in Sault Ste. Marie lose access to their primary care doctors, they're going to be forced to rely on those increasingly crowded emergency rooms for their basic needs. The closest emergency room outside of Sault Ste. Marie is four hours away. We heard today of somebody who waited 15 hours recently who also has lost their doctor.

Access to primary care should not depend on where we live. Across the province, I am hearing from countless, countless Ontarians who are worried about losing access to health care as well. For doctors, it's not just about staff or office spaces, it's also about housing and transportation and access to other services. It's impossible for hospitals and clinics to recruit health care workers when there's no accessible housing or transportation—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I will tell you what, I will not take lessons from the member from Sault Ste. Marie who has failed his community so badly—so badly.

1050

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition will please take her seat. The member for Sault Ste. Marie will come to order. The member for Kitchener–Conestoga will come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Perhaps the member for Sault Ste. Marie and the member for Kitchener–Conestoga didn't hear me call them to order.

The Premier can respond.

Hon. Doug Ford: Again, what if I told you, Mr. Speaker, that there is an area—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Doug Ford: The Leader of the Opposition really insulted the 2,400 doctors who graduated last year and called them “phantom doctors.” If that applies to all 10,000, I wonder if the 17,500 nurses—a record here in Ontario—are phantom nurses as well. I wonder if the new universities that we are building, medical schools across the province, are phantom universities. I wonder if the 260 undergraduate and 449 post-graduate seats are phantom seats.

I’m wondering about the health care that is at an all-time high right now, at \$81 billion. We’ve spent over \$21 billion more in the last five years than the—

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Premier will please take his seat.

The final supplementary: once again, the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to use my last supplementary to ask about another emerging health care issue. This government’s privatization-for-profit scheme is leaving patients across this province frustrated and very, very deeply worried about being charged for medically necessary services.

The Minister of Health has stood there and said that they are expanding private cataract surgeries, but we have more reports today that dozens of patients are being overbilled and charged for additional lenses and services that they did not ask for. This is exactly what we warned about: Patients being told they will only have to use their health card are just being handed a bill for thousands of dollars after their treatment.

The minister’s response has been incredibly disappointing. She recognized this practice as a violation of the commitment-to-medicare act, but has not offered, to this date, any solutions to protect patients.

I’m going to ask the minister, and I don’t want to hear that these patients consented to it, because it’s clear that patients were misled by this clinic. Minister, when will you enforce your own regulations and stop companies profiting off the backs of patients?

Interjections.

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

The Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I think it’s important to put some numbers and facts on the table, Speaker. In the province of Ontario, every single year we have 150,000 cataract and minor surgeries happening. Over the course of two years, where the member opposite is talking about 13 complaints, we in fact had 300,000 minor eye surgeries and cataract surgeries in the province of Ontario.

Those are real people. Those are real people who are now talking and reading books to their grandchildren, who are now volunteering back in their communities, who are now back in their cars driving around. We have people who are impacted when we make decisions to expand surgical and diagnostic centres in the province of Ontario. In fact, in the last year, one single announcement that the

Premier made in January of 2023 led to 17,000 additional people getting access to cataract and minor eye surgeries. Those are the facts.

NORTHERN HEALTH CARE

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: *Remarks in Anishiniimowin.* The question is for the Premier. Speaker, the health care system in northern Ontario has huge challenges. We are short hundreds of doctors and people are getting sicker. People are dying. This is the Ontario that I know.

Two weeks ago, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation declared a health state of emergency across the whole north, not just on reserves. This government doesn’t have the courtesy to respond when emergencies get declared. Northern health care should not operate in a state of emergency. Will the government respond to the state of emergency? Yes or no?

Interjections.

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

Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, perhaps the member opposite is not aware of the fact that, in fact, our Minister of Indigenous Affairs, our Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and myself have all actively engaged in conversations and offered solutions and assistance to the people of northern Ontario.

I want to highlight again the expansions that we are making in northern Ontario that will directly impact communities: Moosonee and area getting a brand new community Weeneebayko Area Health Authority team; Porcupine; Kapuskasing; Sudbury; Burk’s Falls; Timmins; Chapleau; Wawa; Powassan. We have communities in northern Ontario that need action from our government and we have given it with the announcement of 78 expansions of primary care teams in the province of Ontario. We will always be there with our partners to make sure that we assist, but these expansions are something that I very much hope that you and your party will support when we put it in our budget.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I’ll remind the members to make their comments through the Chair.

The supplementary question? The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: In another shameful milestone for this government, Sudbury now has a private for-profit nurse practitioner-led clinic charging money to patients for each and every visit. The nurse practitioner said, and I will quote her words, “Had the Capreol clinic received funding to hire a permanent position, I would have likely stayed there.”

Speaker, I have hand-delivered modest funding proposals from the Capreol Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic to the Minister of Health numerous times since 2021. We have underemployed nurse practitioners in northern Ontario that would love to care for us in the public system, but this government is bent into private clinics only, forcing them to go to the private sector.

When will the Capreol Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic get the money they have been asking for since 2021?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: When the Chapleau and District Family Health Team received an expansion in the primary care expansion announcement from last month that will serve an additional over 2,000 residents in her community, does she plan to support or vote against that initiative? That's 2,200 people that will get access to health care in your own community. We have 78 examples of that across Ontario—in Thunder Bay, in Kenora and area district. We are making the investments. What I'd like to know from the member opposite is whether they are going to support those expansions through the budget.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is for the Minister of Long-Term Care. Every senior in Ontario deserves access to quality care and quality of life both now and into the future. But many families, like those in my riding of Newmarket–Aurora, are concerned about the safety and well-being of their loved ones in long-term-care homes. While our province already has the toughest inspection and enforcement program in Canada, we must take further action to improve compliance and provide comfort and certainty to residents and their families.

Speaker, can the minister please tell the House what our government is doing to strengthen oversight and resident safety in long-term-care homes?

Hon. Stan Cho: The member addresses some very valid concerns for her constituents, because it goes beyond just building long-term-care homes, which this government is doing to a record level. It goes beyond just health human resources, which this government is doing to record levels once again. It's about the safety of those in long-term-care homes. That's why, since I was appointed five and a half months ago, we have been working tirelessly to ensure that that is the number one priority within the long-term-care setting.

Supported by an investment of \$72.3 million, I announced last month the formation of Ontario's first dedicated long-term-care investigative unit. The new 10-member unit will go after the worst offenders in the long-term-care system, and I want to be very clear, Speaker: I hope that they never have to be used. These investigators have the authority to add more accountability to address the most serious forms of non-compliance so Ontarians can be sure that their loved ones are safe.

1100

I'll repeat it in this Legislature once again: Our seniors took care of us. It is our turn to take care of them.

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: It's great to hear the minister talk about the measures our government is taking to ensure every long-term-care resident lives with dignity and is offered the care they deserve.

While this is an important step forward in protecting Ontario's seniors, some individuals are concerned that it

will be used to punish workers in the sector. Speaker, we know that front-line staff are essential in providing quality care to residents each and every day. That's why our government must build on the progress already made and continue to invest in initiatives that will expand and enhance the long-term-care workforce.

Can the minister please elaborate on how our government is supporting staff in long-term-care homes to deliver safe and effective care?

Hon. Stan Cho: That's very fair. The member raises what is probably the most important piece of our long-term-care-home system and that is the hard-working front-line health care workers who make these homes homes every single day, doing the work for our loved ones that, frankly, many of us cannot do.

This unit is set out—and I want to be very clear on this—to go after the worst offenders and hold them to account for their actions. And as I said, we hope they are never used.

Service to our residents is the most important thing. That's why our government is making sure we take care of our staff and give them the tools to do their jobs better. Just last fall, we invested \$300 million to recruit thousands of PSWs to the long-term-care sector. In 2023 alone, we increased the local priorities fund by \$35 million to support residents with complex needs.

We also invested \$342 million into immediate and longer-term recruitment initiatives that would add over 13,000 workers to Ontario's health care system. This includes 5,000 new and upskilled registered nurses and registered practical nurses, as well as 8,000 PSWs.

Speaker, the cat is out of the bag. This Premier is taking care of front-line health care workers and the amazing residents within the long-term-care system.

ADDICTION SERVICES

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. Earlier this month, the mayor of Belleville declared a local state of emergency after EMS responded to 17 drug overdoses in just over 24 hours, with a total of 23 overdoses in less than 48 hours. Devastated by the loss and desperate for support, the mayor of Belleville reached out to this Conservative government, only to have the request ignored.

Belleville needs \$2 million to fund a local health and social services hub and a detox centre to address the ongoing addictions and overdose crisis. There is no time to wait. The community wants to see a new service hub open by the end of this year. So my question to the Premier is this: Will you immediately fund the desperately needed service hub and detox centre for Belleville?

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

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, after decades of neglect by previous governments, addictions and support services in Ontario have rotted. They are non-existent. It's a deeply unfortunate situation in Belleville, but unlike those governments, we

take these issues seriously and we have already taken action to alleviate the pressure on the city and have begun discussions on longer-term solutions.

Last week, I joined the member for Bay of Quinte in Belleville, where we announced emergency funding to address the immediate needs of the community as identified by the CMHA. We're helping them to increase temporary staffing at key service providers, add mental health supports for existing staff, improve the security of the downtown area and purchase new equipment for outreach teams and service providers that will help them identify and intervene early in the event of an overdose.

We also met with the mayor, the first responders and health care agencies to talk about the situation and how we're going to work together to improve mental health and addictions care in Belleville. Mr. Speaker, we have a clear agenda to ensure that we build a system that will help the people of Belleville.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: With all due respect to the associate minister, you have been in government for six years. The overdose crisis, the number of people dying, the service cuts have been under your watch. It's time to take responsibility and stop putting it off on somebody else.

Belleville desperately needs adequate funding to build and operate a local service hub, not measly one-time funding. They need reliable, continuous support to address the addictions and overdose crisis.

The community has been asking, pleading for this funding for months with no answer from this government. It's not a "tough ask," as the Conservative member for that riding and the associate minister have told the mayor. What's tough is watching our family members and our community members overdose and die in the streets.

Last week, the Premier acknowledged the need to urgently fund mental health and addiction supports, but the people of Belleville still have no commitment for a much-needed service hub and detox centre in their community. So I ask the Premier again: Will you honour your promise about increasing supports by immediately funding the construction and operation of a local health and social services hub and detox centre in Belleville? Yes or no?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats, and I'll remind members to make their comments through the Chair.

The Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Once again, I'd like to point out to my colleague on the other side of the House just where we are, and to suggest that we haven't done anything in the last six years—Mr. Speaker, this is the first government to have a minister responsible for mental health and addictions; the first government to invest historic amounts in mental health and addictions.

Let's just start with where we began. How about the fact that you closed 13% of Ontario's mental health beds and 9,645 hospital beds? How about the fact that you're

the ones that created the doctor shortage in the first place? How about the fact that you cut \$53 million in mental health supports when you were in power? How about the fact that you voted against the Roadmap to Wellness and did not provide the support to the government in ensuring that we built the system—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Windsor West, come to order.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Mr. Speaker, we need a continuum of care, not piecemeal solutions. What we are doing as a government is ensuring that that continuum is built, not only in Belleville but everywhere across the province of Ontario. We've opened 400 beds, 7,000 treatment spots—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock.

Order. Order.

Okay. Let's start the clock. The next question.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Will Bouma: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Ontario's agricultural and food industry contributes over \$48 billion to our province's GDP and our economy. In my riding of Brantford-Brant, there are over 1,400 agri-food businesses that all serve a vital role in contributing to Ontario's economic prosperity and job creation. That's why it is of critical importance that our government supports measures that strengthen and grow this vital sector.

People in my riding were thrilled to hear the minister first announce the Grow Ontario Strategy to expand production and enhance efficiencies. Can the minister please provide the House with an update on what our government is doing to implement the strategy and ensure we are supporting the agriculture and food sector?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I appreciate the question from the member from Brantford-Brant very much because it allows us to stand in this House to share with everyone and those watching live that our Grow Ontario Strategy is working. For example, we had put in our strategy that we wanted to increase exports of Ontario-grown and -produced food by 30% by the year 2020 and essentially, in 2022 and 2023, we've actually increased exports by 20.9%. Ladies and gentlemen, our plan is working.

Furthermore, research is so important and we need to continue to innovate. Our strategy set out that we wanted to see more than 250 patents and licences realized by the year 2032. Through 2022 to the end of 2023, we actually saw 43 patents and licences realized through funding by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Our strategy is on the mark—

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

1110

The supplementary question?

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Minister, for that response. From the minister's response, it's clear that our

government has committed to tangible actions that will ensure the continuous growth of the agri-food sector in Ontario.

Agri-food businesses in my community and across the province expect their government to implement measures that are innovative and will address their needs. It's critical that our government ensures that these industries have access to new processes, new equipment and new technology to expand production and enhance efficiency.

Speaker, can the minister please provide an update on some of the actions and results of the new Grow Ontario Strategy?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I really am pleased and proud to share with you that not only are farmers responding to the importance and the need to drive innovation to realize efficiencies and increase yields, but our processors are as well, and our programs are hitting the mark.

Just last week, I was in Strathroy, and I visited Nortera. It's a processing plant that specializes in frozen vegetables. They actually have plants in Strathroy, Ingersoll and Tecumseh in southwestern Ontario, and they process 635 million pounds of frozen vegetables. Last year, they actually invested in new technologies to drive line efficiencies that ultimately resulted from a new enhanced bagging and scale piece of equipment. This spring, based on success, they're actually investing in new optical sorting equipment that will drive continued product quality.

Again, Speaker, our strategy to grow Ontario is working, and—

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

The next question.

FOREST INDUSTRY

MPP Lise Vaugeois: To the Minister of Natural Resources, through you, Speaker: As you know, the mill in Terrace Bay has been idled since January. I have met with the union leadership, mayors, First Nations chiefs, our provincial and federal representatives and small business owners in Terrace Bay and Schreiber, and nothing has happened to slow down the potential social and economic collapse of these communities. There are 500 direct lost jobs but 1,900 jobs at risk throughout the region.

Given that the owners of the mill won't communicate beyond saying they will entertain offers of purchase, I'm wondering what update the government can share with these workers about their plans to address this issue.

Hon. Graydon Smith: Thank you for the question. First and foremost, our thoughts are with those workers in Terrace Bay in that mill that has been idled. We want to get them back to work as soon as possible. That's why, Mr. Speaker, the moment that this happened, we started outreach not only to the workers but to the mayors of the affected communities all through the sector to make sure that we have opportunities that are presented to us to work

with the owners, to work with the sector to find a way to get this mill back up and running again.

Speaker, we know that the forestry sector is a very integrated sector. When something like this happens, it can cause challenges all throughout the sector. We are leaving no stone unturned to find a way to get this mill back open, whether it's with the current owner or whether it's with another operator. We know that the future of forestry in northern Ontario still remains bright. We will find ways to get over this hurdle and continue to make northern Ontario the strong powerhouse that it deserves to be.

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

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Back to the minister: Thank you for that response. The company received almost \$130 million in provincial grants, yet they don't appear to have any responsibility toward the workers or toward remediating the extensive pollution they are leaving behind.

Who is going to ensure that the company does not get away with leaving a huge cleanup liability for a potential buyer or the community of Terrace Bay?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Again, we continue to work with ownership of the mill to ensure that everything remains compliant and that this mill opens again. The single best thing that can happen is that this mill opens again, continues to produce the products that make northern Ontario strong through the integrated forestry sector, and we can work through the challenges that exist today and to a future tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, this government continues to invest in the forestry sector in Ontario; we'll make no bones about that. We want to ensure that this sector is very strong in the northwest, in the northeast and all throughout the integrated—and I'll use that word many, many times, "integrated"—forestry sector that exists in this province. It is one of the backbones of our province's economy, and 142,000 people work in this sector. We're making investments every day, whether it's through our biomass program or our forestry innovation program, to ensure that opportunities continue to exist in forestry in Ontario now and well into the future.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Adil Shamji: Mr. Speaker, for the Premier: 60 seconds isn't enough time to list this government's failures in health care, but let's give it a try. What if I told you emergency room wait times are the worst they've ever been, and ER closures have become the norm? That's because we're losing family doctors faster than we're gaining them, and thousands of patients are losing primary care overnight.

On top of that, Bill 124 has shattered our workforce for nothing—you sure got that done—and there's still no health care worker retention plan, so now temporary staffing agencies have stepped in and are burning a hole in our hospitals and long-term-care homes. But the Premier says, "Just let it burn." As a result, hospital debts are ballooning, and they're being forced to rely on high-

interest loans because this government does not have their back. And now, desperate patients are being forced to turn to private for-profit clinics that are overcharging elderly patients while this government turns a blind eye.

Mr. Speaker, why should this government trust any of the Premier's promises when all he has to show for his efforts is this long list of health care woes?

Hon. Doug Ford: As I said before, your government destroyed the health care system here in Ontario. Mr. Speaker, they fired 1,600 nurses; we've registered 80,000 nurses, 17,500 last year alone. They were so dysfunctional, the OMA, the Ontario Medical Association, wouldn't even speak to them. They shut down hospital beds like we've never seen. They created hallway health care.

What we've done: We've added 3,500 beds. We're adding another 3,000 beds. We've added 10,000 doctors. We've added 80,000 registered nurses. We're building universities that are going to create the next doctors—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The Premier will take his seat. The member for Ottawa South will put the cards back in his wallet.

Supplementary question?

Mr. Adil Shamji: While the Premier loves to fall back on the Liberal mismanagement distraction, he does nothing but highlight his own mismanagement, which is, quite frankly, beyond comparison.

The government loves to brag about all the money it spent on health care, but what does it have to show for it? You wouldn't see me bragging about spending millions of dollars on a car that doesn't start. This government has created a problem that it cannot fix.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to all Ontarians: They're not thinking about your future; they're thinking about their future. They don't care about bringing your emergency room wait times down, and they don't care about emergency room closures. They don't care about keeping your family doctor or your nurse practitioner. They don't care about anything unless someone is making a profit, whether it's temporary nursing agencies, private for-profit clinics, developers drooling over the greenbelt, private companies like Staples, Shoppers Drug Mart and Loblaws. This government will always lead with greed.

Mr. Speaker, when will this government realize they could give the people of Ontario so much more if they would only focus on people, not profits?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Oh, Speaker. Let's do a bit of compare and contrast, shall we? The Liberal government cut residency positions in the province of Ontario. The Conservative government actually expands residency positions, and two new medical schools in the province of Ontario, in Brampton and in Scarborough.

The previous Liberal Premier acknowledged, after you were defeated, that her biggest regret was how she decimated the health care system. It was your Premier and your leader who said that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Stop the clock.

1120

I apologize to the Minister of Health. I had to interrupt because I couldn't hear what she was saying because of the noise in the House.

I'm going to ask the member for Ottawa South to come to order and the government House leader to come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Start the clock. Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you.

The numbers show that we are investing more in health care in the province of Ontario—and we did that, Speaker, without raising taxes. How did we do that? We did that by expanding the economy to make sure that more people are working in the province of Ontario, to make sure that people are investing in the province of Ontario. And by doing that, we've been able to invest and expand the health care budget by over \$20 billion.

HOUSING

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: My question is for the Associate Minister of Housing.

Like many provinces, Ontario is in a housing supply crisis, which has been decades in the making. One of the key areas we need to see improvement in is purpose-built rental housing. Due to excessive red tape and high construction costs, fewer rental units have been built over the past 40 years. In fact, over 80% of Ontario's purpose-built rental units were built before 1980. That's why our government must continue to take action to ensure we are improving rental housing construction across the province.

Speaker, can the minister please update the House on the progress our government has made on purpose-built rental housing?

Hon. Rob Flack: Thank you to the member from Mississauga—Erin Mills for that question. Know that Ontario set a new record in 2023 on purpose-built rental housing. It was the largest in our history, even above 2022, which was record. CMHA says that we got nearly 19,000 starts last year, up 27%. But we know that much more should be done in that arena and also in all types of housing construction. But results count, and our actions are working. We've lowered development charges, we've reduced red tape and the costs associated with it, and we've removed the HST on purpose-built rentals. Thanks to the Minister of Finance and the Premier for advocating in Ottawa—a job well done.

Speaker, there is much more to do. We know there is, but the best is yet to come.

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

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I thank the associate minister for the response. It is great to hear how our government is building more new homes and getting them built faster.

My constituents were pleased to hear that we are committed to building 120,000 new homes in Mississauga as part of our plan to build 1.5 million homes by 2031. But, Speaker, we know that the former mayor failed to address the housing supply crisis in the city. Under Bonnie Crombie's tenure, Mississauga only hit 27% of its 10-year target—one of the worst records in Ontario. The people of Mississauga deserved stronger leadership to help them achieve their dreams of home ownership.

Speaker, can the minister tell the House how Bonnie Crombie's anti-housing agenda has made it harder to build homes in—

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

Hon. Rob Flack: The record is clear: Mayor Crombie had the worst housing record in the province of Ontario. Allow me to give you some examples.

Last May, Mississauga wouldn't approve an application for nearly 4,700 units. Why? Because the buildings were too tall. Shadows?

Next, Mayor Crombie also blocked a 703-unit housing proposal that would replace a strip mall. Why? She went on record to say that she opposed the building because her favourite bakery was in the mall.

These actions prevented thousands of people from having a roof over their head. Why? Shadows and cake? Good gracious.

Speaker, Mayor Crombie's housing record was abysmal. Ontario families cannot afford Bonnie Crombie.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. Ontario colleges and universities are bracing for the impact of a 50% reduction in international study permits at a time when the sector is already at a breaking point. This was detailed in the blue-ribbon panel report which highlighted decades of chronic underfunding and years of declining provincial grants.

Speaker, does this Premier understand how critical post-secondary institutions are to our province's well-being and prosperity? And will he commit to providing the urgent funding needed immediately to keep our colleges and universities afloat?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for that question. Quite frankly, we're very disappointed with the federal government, who did no consultations whatsoever with the provinces. I ask you today: What have you done to stand up and advocate for more seats in this province?

I've heard from members all across my side and from ministries the impact this is going to have on our economy. At ROMA, I had an opportunity to meet with the tourism industry, who were saying that they're going to be devastated without these students. It is going to be such an impact on the economy. That's why, when we're working with the federal government on the allocations, we will be looking at the labour market needs across regions in Ontario as a number one priority.

Also, ensuring that there is guaranteed housing for international students coming to our campus will be a priority, and ensuring the economic needs of each region is a concern as well.

This is going to be an impact across Ontario, and the federal government did absolutely no consultations with the provinces or with the sector.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll remind the members to make their comments through the Chair.

The supplementary question?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: The federal announcement was last month. We've had years, we've had decades, of chronic underfunding by this government and the Liberals before them which has put our post-secondary institutions starved for resources, and now they are on the brink.

Ontario has had the lowest per-student funding in Canada since they started keeping statistics, spending half or less of what other provinces do. We have at least 10 universities and now many colleges facing deficits, which is going to put the sector and our communities at risk. Students are already struggling with cuts to OSAP and cuts to student supports and services. They should not be expected to cover this government's failure to properly fund with tuition increases.

Speaker, what exactly is this government's plan to keep Ontario's colleges and universities solvent and sustainable?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: What I want to say is that what we are doing for students under the leadership of this Premier is keeping tuition affordable for students across the province. This is not a burden that's going to be on the backs of students.

I want to thank the blue-ribbon panel for their recommendations and for the hard work they've been doing. As I have said, we will be announcing our path forward shortly. But when we look at the impact that the federal government's decision is going to have—the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade comes here every week with a new company wanting to come to Ontario. Why is that? Because of the skilled labour force that we have in this province.

I've talked to our colleges and universities about the impact it's going to have. I was at Fanshawe College recently with the member from the area and we heard directly from them. Volkswagen came to the area because of the skilled labour market. Fanshawe is concerned about that. I've talked to Georgian College in my own neighbourhood, talking about the impact it's going to have on hospitality and tourism in our region. This is going to be a huge impact and the fact that the federal government did this with absolutely zero consultation with the provinces and the post-secondary—

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

1130

OIL AND GAS WELLS

Mr. Trevor Jones: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. Ontario has records for

nearly 27,000 oil and gas wells, with a number of them located in my riding of Chatham-Kent–Leamington. In 2021, a devastating explosion occurred in the village of Wheatley because of gas that surfaced through an abandoned well in the area. It was heartbreaking that 20 people were injured from my community and several buildings severely damaged. Our government has since taken robust action in helping my community rebuild and heal, but we must continue to come together, overcome challenges and ensure residents in my riding and across Ontario have a bright and safe future.

Speaker, can the minister please share what our government is doing to tackle risks posed by inactive oil and gas wells?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Thank you to the member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington for the question. Boy, he’s doing a great job for his constituents every day, including the people in Wheatley. I know they really appreciate it.

Speaker, recently I had a chance to be in Norfolk with my friend Mayor Martin and her council and members of the fire and rescue staff there for a great announcement: a \$2-million announcement supporting municipalities throughout southwestern Ontario, allowing them to purchase protective equipment, like gas monitoring equipment, to ensure plugged gas wells remain safe, providing training to emergency responders, making investments customized to their community that matter most.

I just highlight Wheatley again because recently, Chatham-Kent Fire and Rescue have been handing out personal protective gas monitors for homes. Resident of the town Kellie Adamson said, “It’s nice to have an alarm so we feel safe.” Those alarms are being paid for using a provincial grant from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Speaker, it’s all about keeping people safe in their communities and making investments that matter, like the \$23.6 million in our—

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

The supplementary question.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Thank you to the minister for his response and for personally coming to my community several times to listen, to work with experts and take decisive action. It’s reassuring to see our government is committed to keeping communities safe. With this investment, communities like Wheatley will be able to prevent petroleum-related emergencies in the future and deliver better protection for all of Ontario. The dangers of old oil and gas wells, as evidenced from my community, are serious and ongoing. Our government must continue to do all we can to reduce risks and ensure that our plan addresses our municipalities’ needs.

Speaker, can the minister please elaborate on how our government is working to improve both emergency preparedness and risk prevention for communities across Ontario?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Thanks again for the question. As I was saying, the geology of southwest Ontario is unique. It presented opportunities, but it also presents safety challenges and risks that are unique to that part of

the province of Ontario. That’s why \$23.6 million, as I said in my first answer, is being invested to ensure safety for those residents, to plug more wells—more than the opposition ever considered plugging when they were on the case. For example, we’re doing more on the innovation side too, to get ahead of this—\$6 million for scientific studies and research to improve our understanding of these wells while providing better risk mitigation for our teams on the ground.

Mr. Speaker, we know there is always more work to do on this file. We’ll continue to engage with municipalities, landowners, industry, Indigenous communities and the public as we work to ensure the safety of those in southern Ontario who are counting on us. We’re delivering.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. On February 1 and 2, Kirkland Lake and Temiskaming Shores OPP and enforcement officers from the MTO did a commercial safety blitz on trucks. I’d like to thank the officers. I’d like to thank all the truckers who actually run a safe rig—and the companies. But on February 1 and 2, 75 trucks were pulled over for inspection; 36 were pulled off the road for safety—pulled off the road. Nearly half the trucks on the Trans-Canada Highway that day were pulled off the road under the minister’s watch.

Is that acceptable?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Mr. Speaker, we have increased enforcement all across the province, especially focusing on the north. Safety is a top priority for this government, and I thank those hard-working officers, the MTO officials that are on the roads and making sure that our roads are safe. We have some of the safest roads in all of North America.

We will continue to do whatever we can to have the highest standards of training, highest standards of road safety—as we have done—whether that be investing in critical infrastructure, expanding highways, investing in keeping those highways safe, like Highway 17. I’m very proud of the work that those officers have done to keep those streets safe and continue to have that compliance and enforcement across our highways, especially in the north, Mr. Speaker.

Safety is a top priority and we will do whatever we can to keep the people of this province safe, especially on our roads and especially our truck drivers and those who travel on those roads.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: Thanks for that answer.

With all due respect, on February 1 and 2, half the trucks on the Trans-Canada were unsafe in a blitz. So it’s safe to assume that the other days, like today, also half of them are unsafe. And another little statistic for Temiskaming: If your car is registered in the district of Temiskaming, you’re four times as likely to die in an accident than if it’s registered in Toronto.

Once again, this was a blitz. But what about when the blitzes aren't happening? What is this government going to do to ensure that all trucks are safe on the Trans-Canada, not just half?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: To that member: We've actually had a blitz going, especially in the north, with a targeted focus since July of this year, Mr. Speaker. It's been a plan that we have listened to and looked at the concerns by many in the industry and increased enforcement across the north. It's also why we're investing over \$3 billion in improving our roads every single year.

Mr. Speaker, every measure that we have taken, whether it's been adding more lights, expanding lanes, the 2+1 pilot that we are running in the north for increased safety—those members right there have voted against it every single time. When it comes to safety, when it comes to increasing enforcement, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to increasing the number of officers that we have on the road, the NDP and Liberals have voted against those safety measures every step of the way. That's unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

This government will continue to invest in our enforcement officers, will continue to invest in making our roads safer and the necessary improvements that are needed to support that—

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

SKILLED TRADES

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: My question is for the Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity. We know that supporting more women in the workforce benefits Ontario's economy, especially in in-demand sectors such as the skilled trades.

At the present time, the number of women employed in the skilled trades is well below their male counterparts. In 2022, women accounted for only 8.1% of the labour force in trades, transport and related occupations in Ontario. That's why it is critical for our government to continue to invest in programs that break down barriers for women so that they have the tools they need to join the workforce.

Speaker, can the associate minister highlight some of the ways our government is expanding opportunities for women to find good work and good pay in the skilled trades?

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: Thank you to the member from Oakville North–Burlington for the question.

It's good to be back in the House to share some of the amazing things that women are building across Ontario, from being 10,000 feet deep in a mine in Timmins and talking to the skilled women working underground, from discussions with the chambers of commerce and boards of trade in North Bay, in Brockville, Kitchener—just to name a few ridings that I've had the privilege to visit—I heard how women are being empowered and are helping to build a stronger Ontario together.

Alongside these women, our government is working to build women's economic opportunities and increase their safety through financial independence. That's why I was

very pleased to recently announce the expansion and call for applications for the Women's Economic Security Program which will bring us closer to that goal.

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

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you to the associate minister for her response. It is encouraging that our government is focused on investments and initiatives that will support women to become economically secure and independent.

Speaker, Ontario is facing the largest labour shortage in a generation. With thousands of jobs going unfilled in the skilled trades, it's critical that we provide supports for women to pursue fulfilling and good-paying careers in these sectors. Can the associate minister share with the House how our government is expanding and increasing training opportunities for women?

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: The Women's Economic Security Program provides training for low-income women to equip them with the skills, the knowledge and the experience to get a job. And to ensure their success, participants can also access wraparound supports. Since its inception in 2018, we know this program has been working, because the Women's Economic Security Program has helped thousands of women either start a business or get a job in the skilled trades.

It's time to build on these results. I'm very pleased to announce that our government is increasing the investment to this program by a half a million dollars, bringing our total investment this year to \$5.5 million. That marks nearly a 10% increase to the program this year alone. This will allow more women across Ontario to access the supports they need to enter or re-enter the workforce, build rewarding careers and increase their safety through financial independence, because in Ontario we truly believe that when women succeed, Ontario succeeds.

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

I have two members who want to raise points of order, as I understand. The first one is the member for Ottawa–Vanier.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I am seeking unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 100(a)(iv), five minutes be allotted to the independent members as a group to speak during private members' public business today.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Madame Collard is seeking the unanimous consent of the House that, notwithstanding standing order 100(a)(iv), five minutes be allotted to the independent members as a group to speak during private members' public business today. Agreed? I heard a no.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Sudbury has a point of order.

MPP Jamie West: I'd like to do an introduction for the steelworkers who came down from Sault Ste. Marie. They weren't able to be here in time for introductions this

morning. I want to welcome district director, Myles Sullivan; assistant to the director, Kevon Stewart; Burnie Thorp, of the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees; and, from USW 2251, Joe—you know I know your name—Krpmotich, Rebecca McCracken and Hans De Feyter.

Thank you very much, Speaker. Steelworkers make great leaders.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business this morning, this House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1143 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm happy to present many registered massage therapists who are with us here today, so bear with me. First, we have Michael Feraday, executive director and CEO of the Registered Massage Therapists' Association of Ontario. We also have Darren Nixon, Catherine Roe, Richard Lebert, Jenn Hewitt, Don Dillon, Dani Faucher, Brittany Wistuba, Debbie Wilcox, Lily Meyer, Iain Robertson, Nicki Iskander, Laura Tracey, Ian Kamm, Emilie McKay, Kirsten Greenleaf, Renata Deforest, Jules Poulin, David Raniga, Brandy John, Melissa Hampson, Margaret Wallis-Duffy, Dianna Ernest, and Alex Berger.

Welcome to Queen's Park, to all those registered massage therapists.

MPP Jamie West: After question period, when I stumbled over Joe Krpmotich's name several times, I completely forgot to introduce Marc Ayotte. He was nice enough to give me his business card so I'd remember him, even though I've known him for almost 20 years.

Welcome to Queen's Park, Marc.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have with us in the Speaker's gallery today the Honourable Greg Fergus, the Speaker of the House of Commons of Canada. Please join me in warmly welcoming Speaker Fergus to the Ontario Legislature.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MASSAGE THERAPY DAY ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 SUR LE JOUR DE LA MASSOTHÉRAPIE

Madame Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 164, An Act to proclaim Massage Therapy Day /
Projet de loi 164, Loi proclamant le Jour de la
massothérapie.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I would like to invite the member to briefly explain her bill, if she wishes to do so.

M^{me} France Gélinas: The bill is quite simple. It proclaims the third Wednesday in October in each year as Massage Therapy Day, so we can recognize those professionals who help people every single day.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

TRAITE DES PERSONNES

Hon. Michael Parsa: Speaker, tomorrow is Human Trafficking Awareness Day in Ontario and across the country. As many members of this House know, human trafficking is a cruel and vicious crime that deprives individuals of their freedom, dignity and basic human rights.

Here in Ontario, the most common form of human trafficking is sex trafficking, with children and young women being the most targeted. I find it deeply troubling to see that the average age of recruitment into sex trafficking is just 13 years of age.

Victims are lured by traffickers who pretend to be their friends or romantic partners, often gaining their trust and then manipulating them and coercing them into being trafficked. In many cases, the victims believe that their traffickers care for them, making it all the more devastating when they're exploited and abused.

Victims are isolated from their families as well as their friends. They can be moved away from home, left with no access to money or ID, and can have loans taken out in their names, making it very hard for them to leave their traffickers.

That's why our government supported the passage of legislation which protects survivors of human trafficking from fraudulent debts incurred by traffickers in their name—and I want to thank the member for putting that initiative forward.

Speaker, human trafficking is a deeply troubling, multi-faceted problem that demands nothing less than a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach, and our government is taking action to fight it.

In March 2020, we launched a comprehensive, \$307-million strategy to combat human trafficking. The strategy focuses on raising awareness, protecting victims, intervening early, supporting survivors and holding offenders accountable. Our strategy includes key actions in law enforcement, led by my colleague the Solicitor General, who will say a few words right after me.

In the transportation sector, our government is taking actions led by my colleague the Minister of Transportation, including investing in training for truck drivers, such as:

—the program developed by the Women's Trucking Federation of Canada to help drivers spot the warning signs if they encounter someone who is being trafficked;

—placing decals on buses and trains operated by Metrolinx and Ontario Northland, so anyone who needs help is aware of the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline number; and

—training drivers and operators of public transportation vehicles to be aware of the signs of human trafficking and where to direct someone if they need help.

We're also taking comprehensive actions to keep students in our schools safe—online and in person—from violent offenders. This work is being led by my colleague the Minister of Education, who introduced a first-of-its-kind policy in Canada that requires all school boards to have an anti-sex-trafficking protocol in place to protect students and disrupt trafficking networks. He was the first minister in Canada to mandate anti-human-trafficking knowledge for students in the health and phys-ed curriculum in 2019, and he invested more than \$1.6 million this year to help community partners and school boards deliver tools and resources to support student safety initiatives, including addressing victimization and violence, to help prevent sex trafficking. He also implemented mandatory training for all educators and staff to recognize, identify, respond to and prevent sex trafficking.

Speaker, our anti-human-trafficking strategy represents the largest total investment in dedicated anti-human-trafficking services and supports in the country. This includes specialized supports designed to protect children and youth from sex trafficking, like the Children at Risk of Exploitation Units, or CARE units. These units are intervention teams that pair up police officers with child protection workers and Indigenous liaisons who work collaboratively to identify and locate children experiencing or at risk of trafficking, connect them with culturally relevant supports, and investigate and hold offenders accountable.

In 2021, we launched Ontario's first CARE units in the city of Toronto and in Durham region, with an investment of \$11.5 million over three years. And these units are changing lives every single day. Between April 2022 and March 2023, they supported 218 children and youth who had experienced or were at risk of sex trafficking, and 136 of them were under the age of 15. These are young people who, without the intervention of the CARE unit, might not have known how to get help or that there was a way out of trafficking.

1510

Our next priority is to establish a CARE unit in a northern community where Indigenous youth are disproportionately impacted by sex trafficking. I am pleased to report that we have begun community engagements on a new CARE unit in the Kenora region, which I announced last month with my colleague the Minister of Indigenous Affairs. Our discussions with Indigenous representatives, community-based organizations, children's aid societies and police services will help us develop an intervention model that reflects the unique needs of the region, and it will ultimately help protect more children, youth and Indigenous women and girls from this horrible crime.

Since we are approaching the final year of our anti-human trafficking strategy, we're starting a review to inform our next steps. This review will involve hearing from the public, survivors of human trafficking and family members, as well as Indigenous communities and organizations, and front-line service providers. Our goal is to ensure that Ontario's strategy is as effective as possible so we can continue making progress towards ending this crime.

As we prepare to mark Human Trafficking Awareness Day tomorrow, I'd like to recognize the tireless work of community organizations and front-line workers across the province providing services and supports to survivors and people at risk. We're deeply grateful to the hundreds of service providers working across Ontario. From early intervention to crisis supports, their efforts directly contribute to the safety and wellness of the individuals and communities they serve. Thanks to their commitment and dedication, victims and survivors have access to the critical supports they need as they heal and rebuild their lives. Today, we join our voices with theirs to shed light on human trafficking.

I also encourage my colleagues in the Legislature to learn the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline number: 1-833-900-1010. Please post it in your offices and share it with people in your communities. It could help someone in need or even save their life.

Speaker, I believe that, together, we can build a future where all Ontarians are free to live a life without the fear of violence, abuse and exploitation.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, I'll recognize the Solicitor General.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: In my role as Solicitor General, it's my duty to ensure that Ontarians across the province are kept safe.

Monsieur le Président, rien pour moi, en tant que solliciteur général, n'est plus important que la sécurité de notre province.

I take my role very seriously every single day, and today is no different.

Human Trafficking Awareness Day provides an opportunity in which all Ontarians are encouraged to stand up and deliver a powerful message: that human trafficking is unacceptable. This is, without a doubt, one of the most vicious and violent crimes. This horrific crime has never been and will never be tolerated here in Ontario. Our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, recognizes that these heinous acts are unacceptable—and through Minister Parsa's efforts and my own, we will continue fighting to eradicate this awful practice.

Human traffickers often target society's most vulnerable, including young girls, some as young as 13 years old. But it doesn't end there. This crime does not discriminate. People of all ages and genders and backgrounds can become victims of trafficking. Often, society's most vulnerable are specifically targeted and coerced into these situations.

Mr. Speaker, it hits close to home. The more I've travelled Ontario, the more questions I ask. Last year,

when I went to visit my friend our great member from Sarnia–Lambton, we went to the border in Sarnia. I assumed that human trafficking only comes across the borders—but we know it doesn't; it can be everywhere in Ontario.

When I travelled in the northern part of Ontario to Thunder Bay, I asked the question, “Do you have a human trafficking issue here in Thunder Bay?” It's everywhere. It's despicable. Unfortunately, it doesn't limit itself, as I just said, to one specific area of Ontario or a border.

Unfortunately, the greater Toronto area, an area where my own constituency is, is a hot spot for these organized crime rings to target. So many people call Toronto home for many good reasons, and it's not right that Toronto—and anywhere in Ontario—can be victimized by human traffickers.

I've said this before: Enough is enough. We all have the inherent right to live safely in our own homes and communities. It's not right that we have human traffickers who prey on the most vulnerable.

It's no secret that under our government, keeping Ontario safe is one of our top priorities. Daily, I work with my colleagues in government and I work with my colleagues throughout this Legislature to promote public safety. I work to ensure that we're putting our best foot forward to help protect everyone from exploitation.

It's important to recognize this today with reflection on why we're speaking today.

As Solicitor General, we have partnered with Ontario's Attorney General and my colleague the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services for something that is important. Together, we're working to develop an innovative, anti-human-trafficking strategy. This will coincide with our government's Combating Human Trafficking Act that was put forward in 2021. I'm proud to say that we are investing \$307 million through this comprehensive strategy. This is something that brings together community advocates and families and governments and all individuals who support the fight to eradicate trafficking of all kinds. This is something that brings together social services and health care providers and law enforcement and justice partners.

I'll say it again: We will not stop. We can't stop. How can we stop when we have to eradicate something that is evil? We're going to close the gaps with shared goals of raising awareness and protecting the victims and supporting the survivors and holding offenders accountable.

I want to repeat that last part: We will hold offenders accountable.

There has never been a government that I am aware of, in my lifetime, that has been more concerned about public safety than our government, led by Premier Ford.

If people think it's okay to act in a criminal way—it's not. We will find you, and we will lock you up.

I want to express that our strategy of fostering stronger relationships between law enforcement and justice sectors is absolute. In making these pivotal investments, we're breaking up these criminal rings.

I want this House to know that we are already seeing the fruits of our work.

One example of our funding is the intelligence-led joint forces strategy. This initiative is prominently between the Ontario Provincial Police and 20 municipal and First Nations police services that have worked to help identify, investigate and disrupt human trafficking organizations operating in Ontario. Established in 2021, the IJFS has been responsible for 147 human trafficking charges and 227 other charges being laid. They have also supported 126 victims of human trafficking, helping them to move forward and take back their lives.

1520

Madam Speaker, when I have gone to events in support of strategies, with victim services, as an example—strategies to combat human trafficking, but events in support of victim services all across our province—it has been a great honour. I go there to listen and to learn.

Our government has taken a tough-on-crime approach—and I've said this already—because we all have a right to live safely in our own homes and communities. And we're not going to stop. Our government knows that somebody who has been through these moments in their life can feel alone and afraid. That's why we have to come together as a community to stand up against something that is irrefutably awful and evil.

On top of our anti-human trafficking strategy, my ministry has further enhanced its supports by delivering the victim support grants. Since 2022, we've announced almost \$10 million in grants. Through two grant cycles, we've helped support victims and survivors of human trafficking, intimate partner violence, domestic violence and child exploitation. Together, this grant has supported more than 70 projects across the province and provided targeted support to help accomplish our goal.

Law enforcement and the justice sector need the proper tools to improve their ability to identify and target perpetrators. And we're committed to achieving a safe environment for everyone in our province.

Finally, Madam Speaker, I want everyone in this House and across the province to know that, together, we can intercept human trafficking networks. We can find those people and hold them to account, and we'll lock them up where they belong.

Public safety is our government's important and top priority, and I won't stop, the Premier won't stop, this government won't stop, Minister Parsa won't stop—nobody in this Legislature should and will stop until we have a safe community for everyone. Criminals have no place in our Ontario.

On National Human Trafficking Awareness Day, I want to acknowledge all the first responders, the victims and the survivors, and their families. You matter, and we know it. Together, we will keep Ontario safe.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes):
Response?

Mr. Chris Glover: It's a real honour to speak on this upcoming February 22, which is the Canadian anti-human trafficking day—la journée contre la traite des personnes.

My first encounter with somebody who had been trafficked was at the beginning of the pandemic. There was a family staying in a tent under a bridge in my riding. The mother and daughter had been evicted from their home in the 905, and they had been moved into a shelter in downtown Toronto. While they were in there, the 19-year-old daughter had been kidnapped and trafficked for several months. While she was trafficked, she had been hog-tied and shot with fentanyl to make her addicted to fentanyl so that they would have control over her. They eventually escaped. This was at the beginning of the pandemic. The mother got her back, and the mother and mother's boyfriend and the daughter were staying in a tent. There was no other place for them to go.

So we need to address root causes, and I'm going to be talking about addressing root causes in this.

There were 4,000 incidents of human trafficking that were reported to police between 2012 and 2022, and 94% of the victims were women and girls, and the average age of recruitment, as we just heard from the government side, is 13 years old. It's an absolutely despicable crime, and it must be stopped at all levels.

I want to thank my colleagues who were involved in the passing of Bill 41, which is the Protection from Coerced Debts Incurred in relation to Human Trafficking Act. This bill is really important because, besides the sexual exploitation that happens with trafficking, there's also financial exploitation. Traffickers will often go into a bank and take out a credit card in their victim's name, and then that victim, after they escape, is left with that debt and the bad credit rating. This is how Richard Dunwoody, who is a resident in my riding—he came across survivors of human trafficking in shelters, and they could not get out of the shelters because of this financial debt. Because their credit rating had been destroyed, they weren't able to rent a new place. What came of that is a program to support survivors, but also this legislation.

This legislation—if I could make a request to the government—has been passed. We're waiting for the regulations so that it can be implemented. Those regulations cannot come quickly enough, because right now survivors with these financial debts are denied housing, they're denied access to school, they're harassed by credit agencies, and they're often taken to court. So this legislation needs to get through as quickly as possible.

I also want to talk about some solutions. When I was talking with a woman who works with survivors of human trafficking earlier today, she said you need to address the root causes—poverty, housing insecurity and homelessness—because shelters and encampments are places that traffickers go to recruit and to kidnap people, just like that young woman I met at the beginning of the pandemic.

The other thing she said is that we need to provide escape routes. She said she often gets calls from a survivor, a victim of human trafficking, who wants to escape, and they're looking for a safe place to go, but when the agency phones, every shelter is full. So they tell the victim this, and the victim says, "I'll just stay with my trafficker." If we don't have an escape route, they can't

escape. The courage that it takes to escape human trafficking is really remarkable, and we need to reward it. We need to make sure that there's a pathway, and these pathways have to be cognizant of the supports that people who have been trafficked need. As the woman said to me, trafficking is often associated with trauma and substance abuse. The women are often forced to have sex with five to 10 people a night. They're up all night. The first thing they need to do when they escape is to detox, and there's a shortage of detox beds in this province. We need low-barrier housing accommodation for the survivors when they're escaping. The other thing the agent said they need is stable funding.

I heard from the government side that they're reviewing—there was a five-year, \$307-million grant to address human trafficking, and this is under review, but it expires in 2025. The agencies that support people who have been trafficked, who are survivors of human trafficking—to bring an end to human trafficking, those agencies need stable funding. They need to renew leases. They need to retain their staff. They need to do training programs. So it's absolutely vital that that funding be extended and that the promise of that extended funding be made as soon as possible.

PETITIONS

CANCER SCREENING

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Bishop Brigante, who has collected 24,619 names on this petition. This is 7,000 more than what we had yesterday. It reads:

"Lowering the Age Criteria for Colonoscopy Testing to Save Lives.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas colorectal cancer is the leading cause of death for men, and early detection is crucial for successful treatment; and

"Whereas we believe it is time to change the age criteria that doctors use to determine when patients should undergo a colonoscopy; and

"Whereas individuals are considered eligible for a colonoscopy at the age of 50. However, alarming statistics show an increasing number of young" people, "both women and men, being diagnosed with this deadly disease; and

"Whereas screening at an earlier age can detect and treat colorectal cancer in its early stages, significantly improving survival rates and reducing the burden of this devastating disease; and

1530

"Whereas expanding access to colonoscopies for men and women in their thirties can identify precancerous polyps and detect early-stage cancers that may otherwise go unnoticed until they become more advanced and" more "difficult to treat; and

“Whereas it is essential to address the rising incidence of colorectal cancer among younger individuals and take proactive measures to protect their health;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To lower the age criteria for colonoscopy testing and promote greater public awareness of the importance of early detection of colorectal cancer.”

With close to 25,000—24,619—people, I’m happy to sign this petition and send it to the Clerk with my good page Ella.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Mr. Chris Glover: This petition is called “Keep Classrooms Safe for Students and Staff.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas students and education workers deserve stronger, safer schools in which to learn and work;

“Whereas the pressure placed on our education system has contributed to an increase in reports of violence in our schools;

“Whereas crowded classrooms, a lack of support for staff, and underfunding of mental health supports are all contributing to this crisis;

“Whereas the government of Ontario has the responsibility and tools to address this crisis, but has refused to act;

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

“Take immediate action to address violence in our schools;

“Invest in more mental health resources;

“End violence against education workers and improve workplace violence reporting.”

I fully support this petition. I will pass it to page Niklas to take to the table.

MISSING PERSONS

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition titled “Vulnerable Persons Alert.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there is a gap in our current emergency alert system that needs to be addressed;

“Whereas a vulnerable persons alert would help ensure the safety of our loved ones in a situation where time is critical;

“Whereas several municipal councils, including, Brighton, Midland, Bonfield township, Cobourg and Mississauga and several others, have passed resolutions calling for a new emergency alert to protect our loved ones;

“Whereas over 90,000 people have signed an online petition calling for a ‘Draven Alert’ and over 6,000 people have signed an online petition calling for ‘Love’s Law’, for vulnerable people who go missing;

“Whereas this new alert would be an additional tool in the tool box for police forces to use to locate missing, vulnerable people locally and regionally;

“Whereas this bill is a common-sense proposal and non-partisan in nature, to help missing vulnerable persons find their way safely home;

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

“Support and pass Bill 74, Missing Persons Amendment Act, 2023.”

I support this petition wholeheartedly. I will affix my signature to it and give it to page Seyona to bring to the Clerk.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

MPP Lise Vaugeois: This petition is entitled “Support the Gender Affirming Health Care Act.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas two-spirit, transgender, non-binary, gender-diverse and intersex communities face significant challenges to accessing health care services that are friendly, competent and affirming in Ontario;

“Whereas everyone deserves access to health care, and they shouldn’t have to fight for it, shouldn’t have to wait for it, and should never receive less care or support because of who they are;

“Whereas gender-affirming care is life-saving care;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam’s private member’s bill—the Gender Affirming Health Care Advisory Committee Act—to improve access to and coverage for gender-affirming health care in Ontario.”

I fully support this petition. I will sign it and pass it on to page Charles.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It’s my honour to present the following petitions on behalf of Jason “Jay” Staniforth as well as individuals from St. Thomas, Shedden, Port Stanley, London, Aylmer, Grand Bend, Waterloo, and Belmont. This petition is entitled “Keep Classrooms Safe for Students and Staff.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas students and education workers deserve stronger, safer schools in which to learn and work;

“Whereas the pressure placed on our education system has contributed to an increase in reports of violence in our schools;

“Whereas crowded classrooms, a lack of support for staff, and underfunding of mental health supports are all contributing to this crisis;

“Whereas the government of Ontario has the responsibility and tools to address this crisis, but has refused to act;

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

“Take immediate action to address violence in our schools;

“Invest in more mental health resources;

“End violence against education workers and improve workplace violence reporting.”

I completely support this petition. I will affix my signature and deliver it with page Isaac to the Clerks.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to present this petition on paid sick days. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there is overwhelming evidence to show that paid sick days significantly reduce the spread of infectious disease, promote preventative health care and reduce health care system costs; and

“Whereas 60% of Ontario workers do not have access to paid sick days, and cannot afford to lose their pay if they are sick; and

“Whereas low-wage and precarious workers are the most likely to be denied paid sick days; and

“Whereas enabling workers to stay home when they are sick without losing pay helps limit the spread of illness in the workplace and allows workers to recover faster; and

“Whereas during an infectious disease emergency, it is unreasonable and dangerous to public health to make workers choose between protecting their communities and providing for their families; and

“Whereas legislating paid sick days through the Employment Standards Act, with transitional financial support for struggling small businesses, will ensure that workers have seamless, uninterrupted access to their pay;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately amend the Employment Standards Act to provide Ontario workers with 10 employer-paid days of personal emergency leave each year and additional paid sick leave in the case of an infectious disease emergency.”

I fully support this petition, affix my signature and will send it to the table with page Sarah.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Jessica Bell: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas:

“—24% of Ontarians have a disability, thousands of them children...;

“—it is urgent that 100% of units in all new multi-unit housing projects use universal design, to make up for decades of neglecting accessible housing;

“—the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Ontario Human Rights Code prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability;

“—the ongoing practice of permitting inaccessible housing to be approved and financed is in direct contravention of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons

with Disabilities, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Ontario Human Rights Code...;

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

“(1) Comply with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Ontario Human Rights Code by amending the Ontario Building Code to make universal design the mandatory standard for 100% of units in all multi-unit housing developments; and

“(2) Require that any public funds or concessions conferred on municipalities, developers, or any other organization for new housing be exclusively for universally designed housing units; and

“(3) Require that every apartment building (rental or ownership) have on hand a generator capable of powering the elevators and emergency lighting in all corridors for persons with wheelchairs and mobility issues.”

Thank you very much for this petition. I'll be giving it to page Abigail.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Sandra and Bryan Smith for these petitions.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas it has been revealed that the cost of surgeries in private clinics and independent health facilities exceed those in public hospitals;

“Whereas the backlog of surgeries in British Columbia was not reduced by their introduction of private clinics for routine surgeries; and

“Whereas Ontario hospitals have capacity in their surgery rooms for additional complex and routine surgery;

They “petition the Legislative Assembly ... as follows:

“That all funding of private clinics, independent health facilities cease immediately; and

“Further, be it resolved that funds to perform medically necessary surgeries be allocated exclusively to public hospitals in Ontario.”

I support this petition, Speaker, will affix my name to it and ask my good page Isaac to bring it to the Clerk.

1540

FRENCH-LANGUAGE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

MPP Lise Vaugeois: The petition is entitled “Support the University of Sudbury and French-Language Education.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Franco-Ontarians have fought and organized for a century to see a French-only higher education institution developed for, by and with Franco-Ontarians in the north through the University of Sudbury; and

“Whereas 65.9% of Franco-Ontarians believe the province should fund the University of Sudbury towards its French-language-only programming for higher education; and

“Whereas Franco-Ontarians are still fighting to see their charter right protected and have the same higher education given in the French-minority language; and

“Whereas studies have shown that at full capacity, the University of Sudbury will generate \$89.3 million for the region; and

“Whereas there are 8,500 Franco-Ontarians in the region aged between 10 and 19 who could enroll in higher education in French close to their home in the next 10 years;

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

“To provide the needed funding as requested by University of Sudbury of \$10 million a year to ensure the future of University of Sudbury, a higher education institution made for, by and with Franco-Ontarians, starting now.”

I fully endorse this petition and will happily give it to Charles.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition.

“To Raise Social Assistance Rates.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s social assistance rates are well below Canada’s official Market Basket Measure poverty line and far from adequate to cover the rising costs of food and rent: \$733 for individuals on OW and \$1,308 for ODSP;

“Whereas an open letter to the Premier and two cabinet ministers, signed by over 230 organizations, recommends that social assistance rates be doubled for both Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP);

“Whereas small increases to ODSP have still left these citizens below the poverty line. Both they and those receiving the frozen OW rates are struggling to survive at this time of alarming inflation;

“Whereas the government of Canada recognized in its CERB program that a ‘basic income’ of \$2,000 per month was the standard support required by individuals who lost their employment during the pandemic;

“We, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly to double social assistance rates for OW and ODSP.”

I support this petition. I want to thank Dr. Sally Palmer for continuing to send these in. I will affix my name to it and give it to page Sarah to bring to the Clerk.

ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It’s my pleasure to read the following petition into the record. It’s entitled “Develop an Ontario Dementia Strategy.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas it currently takes on average 18 months for people in Ontario to get an official dementia diagnosis,

with some patients often waiting years to complete diagnostic testing;

“Whereas more than half of patients suspected of having dementia in Ontario never get a full diagnosis; research confirms that early diagnosis saves lives and reduces care-partner stress;

“Whereas a PET scan test approved in Ontario in 2017 which can be key to detecting Alzheimer’s early, is still not covered under OHIP in 2022;

“Whereas the Ontario government must work together with the federal government to prepare for the approval and rollout of future disease-modifying therapies and research;

“Whereas the Alzheimer Society projects that one million Canadians will be caregivers for people with dementia, with families providing approximately 1.4 billion hours of care per year by 2050;

“Whereas research findings show that Ontario will spend \$27.8 billion between 2023 and 2043 on alternate-level-of-care (ALC) and long-term-care (LTC) costs associated with people living with dementia;

“Whereas the government must follow through with its commitment to ensure Ontario’s health care system has the capacity to meet the current and future needs of people living with dementia and their care partners;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to develop, commit and fund a comprehensive Ontario dementia strategy.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature and deliver it with page Abigail to the Clerks.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE SAFELY ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 SUR LA CONSTRUCTION SÉCURITAIRE DES INFRASTRUCTURES

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 21, 2024, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 153, An Act to amend the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012 / Projet de loi 153, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2012 sur un système d’information sur les infrastructures souterraines en Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the member from Oshawa.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am glad to be able to take my place in this Legislature—at any time, I’m glad to be able to rise on behalf of the people of Oshawa, but certainly, to be able to stand and speak for a second time for a full hour, I am overjoyed.

Here we are, all of us together, for what will be a riveting one-hour lead. I’m pleased to be able to stand as the critic for the official opposition for infrastructure, transportation and highways. Today, as we have before, we are discussing Bill 153, which is the Building Infrastructure Safely Act.

Really, this is a focus on “Call before you dig.” When we think about digging into the ground to do a home project, if we’re putting in a deck, or whether we’re thinking about putting in broadband—hopefully, one day—across the province of Ontario, we want to know what lies beneath. We want to know that we’re not going to dig and accidentally turn out the lights, at best, or at worst, cause harm to workers or to community members. The “Call before you dig” or “Click before you dig” initiative is obviously an important thing that most of us are familiar with, as residents of Ontario.

I have a lot of voices to share today that were raised before the committee process, but also during the committee process, explaining why parts of this bill are important and also making some suggestions about the next steps for this agency, Ontario One Call, or for the government generally to keep eyes on.

Speaker, this is a bill that makes very small updates to the Ontario One Call system, which has already undergone two previous major updates in the past couple of years. Based on stakeholder reaction, it was something that came from, dare I say, extensive consultation within the stakeholder community and the industry community.

The need to call before you dig and build infrastructure safely is not a new idea for the NDP. In fact, the Ontario NDP co-sponsored a private member’s bill back in 2012—the former member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek co-sponsored Bill 8, the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, with the member from Sarnia–Lambton. When we think about a private member’s bill, many of us who have had the opportunity to table one know that while it might be great and done with the best of intentions, it isn’t necessarily fleshed-out government legislation. That is why we are here and why we have been here before. That private member’s bill has had to evolve, because it ultimately established Ontario One Call as a single point of contact for all underground utility location services in Ontario, and there have needed to be improvements and changes as that agency and organization has come into its own, so to speak, and as they have received feedback from the broader stakeholder world, as I said.

Everyone agrees that locates are a key part of building safely. I’m glad to see, in this case—well, I would always be glad to see it, but in this case, I am able to say that I am pleased that the government did consultation, as we’ve heard from stakeholders. To me, it’s a novelty to be able to stand here and say “good job” on listening to folks—because that’s not usually what we hear. I’m glad to see them listening to excavators and infrastructure owners, and addressing their concerns about efficiencies, inefficiencies, backlogs.

We’re hoping that this is all that’s needed to make this process what it needs to be. We’ll be glad to discuss what we’ve heard from the building industry, environmental partners and municipalities about what is needed to build infrastructure safely in this province going forward.

And because the government has named this bill the Building Infrastructure Safety Act, it’s fair game for me to be able to spend some of this hour talking about other ways

that the government could be building infrastructure safely outside of locates. Talking about locates for a full hour—I can do it; many can. But I just want to make sure that we get as much out of this and put as much into it as we can in that hour, so—

Mr. Dave Smith: Are you saying it’s not exciting to be talking about locates for an hour?

1550

Ms. Jennifer K. French: As I’m being heckled, Speaker, I will only once acknowledge the heckle: It is very exciting to talk about locates for an hour, but while I have the floor, I’m happy to also be excited about talking about other ways that this government could be building infrastructure safely or more safely.

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: That is the only time I’m going to acknowledge the heckle from the member from Peterborough–Kawartha.

I’m going to read a little bit from a press release from Ontario One Call. This is from their Dig Safe Month, but I think that information about safety—it’s always the right time to share this. This is from their press release, and I think it helps to illustrate to the folks at home what on earth we’re talking about. Locates may not be something that folks are super familiar with.

“Everyone has a role to play during April’s ‘Dig Safe Month’

“According to a recent survey, two out of three Ontarians planning to dig this year will inadvertently put themselves, their loved ones, and their community at risk by not requesting a locate through Ontario One Call.

“Digging without locates is dangerous and against the law....

“Ontario One Call is raising awareness about the need to ‘Click Before You Dig’ for any size excavation project.

“We are working with all our partners to ensure that everyone in Ontario understands that if they are planning to dig this year, by law, they must request a locate. That way buried infrastructure owners can identify where their vital cables, wires, and pipes are situated and provide locates,” says Ontario One Call’s Director of Industry Engagement, Ian Simpson. “Everyone needs to dig safely, and the first step is to contact Ontario One Call and request a locate.”

They have stats that they provided:

“There were 4,769 reported damages to buried infrastructure, which is an increase of 8% from the previous year (averaging 19 damages per day);

“—37% of reported damages were due to digging without locates (not requesting and/or digging before receiving a locate);

“—61% of damages caused by people digging without locates were on hazardous and dangerous infrastructure.

“These damages cost billions of dollars to repair and put people at risk. Under the law, if you dig without a locate you are subject to potential fines and liable for any damages....

““We do not provide the actual locates,” says Simpson. “We are the one-stop shop that connects people who want

to dig with the owners of infrastructure. There is no cost to request a locate through Ontario One Call and you will reduce your risk,' says Simpson. 'It's a win-win.'

"If you are planting a tree, building a fence, replacing a mailbox, putting in a new garden, or planning to dig for any reason, you must follow these five steps." Basically, the first step is to reach out to ontarioonecall.ca, request a locate—"wait for all buried infrastructure owners, like the gas, electric, Internet, water, and sewer companies to locate their infrastructure;" review the paperwork provided "to make sure there are no conflicts with where you want to dig;" and number five is to "dig safely."

All of that to say, Ontario One Call came from that original private member's bill to establish that one point of contact for anybody who's wanting to dig safely. Now we have government legislation that has had to evolve—and that's what we're here doing, not just today, but have been doing through this process to make sure that indeed it meets the needs of the organization. It's not a new idea, as I said.

Here's an interesting piece from the Horticultural Trades Association. This is from an article from January 2012. I won't ask the pages how old they are—but some of us might remember. This says, "At the provincial Legislature at Queen's Park on December 2, the Ontario One Call Act, or Bill 8, received all-party support on second reading...."

"This bill affects all of us in the landscape industry. It requires that all municipalities, utility firms, locate companies and other companies who have utility infrastructure in the ground be part of the One Call process...."

"Presently, before digging commences, some landscape and excavation companies need to make as many as 13 calls to ensure that all underground wires, pipes, cables, gas mains, etc., are located. This is a major endeavour by the Ontario Regional Common Ground Alliance to unite the industry to support efforts to create an efficient, cost-effective and simple system...."

"This legislation will save lives, make workers safe and provide an effective cost-efficient process to provide locates for all who live and work in Ontario."

This, again, goes way back, and here we are, still talking about it, but I don't see that as problematic if we continue to fine-tune and make improvements.

I was glad to have a briefing at the beginning of this process, when the bill first was tabled, and this is a bit of a summary as to what is accomplished in this bill. I'll delve into some of these chunks. There are essentially four buckets of changes handled by this piece of legislation. The first one is prohibiting the infrastructure owners from charging for the locates. The current practice is to not charge—but the act is silent. This isn't about anybody charging for locates. If I want to put in a deck and I call One Call, and Bell Canada provides the paperwork to let me know what's there, I don't get a bill for that. Obviously, it would be a deterrent if I had to pay money to get that information. Maybe I'll think, "Oh, I'm sure it's fine," and then we'll end up in a mess. However, the existing act that we're amending with this bill is silent on

fees. It doesn't say you can, but it doesn't say you can't. This bill says, "Now you can't." There was some talk about Enbridge going to start charging \$200 per locate—not for homeowners, but for excavators. They are going through the OEB process to figure out their costs and how to recoup them and whatnot. I'll read a letter from them later. They backtracked on that; it was an idea and it's not happening, but this bill makes sure it can't.

The other bucket is better aligning One Call with other agencies. As I said, this bill initially came in as a private member's bill. It wasn't drafted by government whizzes in the back. So some changes are necessary to make, as we can understand.

Another bucket is removing a certain recourse provision in the act that excavators have—excavators being the folks who would be digging. Now don't think about a deck; think about a massive infrastructure project. Think about, oh, I don't know, one day a subway being built somewhere ever, or a significant building in downtown Toronto. We want to know, as I said, what lies beneath. So removing a certain recourse provision in the act that excavators have and allowing them to take the infrastructure owners to the Ontario Land Tribunal—it hasn't been used to this point, but it removes that provision, anyway. I think that there's still some discussion in the industry about what happens when things go wrong, but that's outside the purview of this act.

The fourth bucket is to enhance the regulation-making authority that the minister has. Provisions for One Call are housed in the act. Some things that One Call would like to be more responsive—this allows the minister to establish. We can talk a bit more about that, but there were specific examples that felt a little in the weeds, and they were not controversial; they were more about an agency running its day-to-day affairs.

That's what we're talking about. That is the bill. We're here at third reading; the bill has been to and through committee and out the other side. We had a number of presenters at committee.

We heard from the Electricity Distributors Association. They presented at committee, and I'll share some of their thoughts:

"The EDA represents Ontario's local hydro utilities, the part of our electricity system closest to customers. Publicly and privately owned utilities, otherwise known as local distribution companies (LDCs), deliver electricity to 5.4 million residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional customers—powering every community in the province.

"The sector owns more than \$30 billion in electricity system infrastructure and invests more than \$2.5 billion annually in the electricity grid. This sophisticated network of infrastructure delivers a significant amount of energy into which billions of dollars have been invested. A substantial proportion of this infrastructure is the subject of the matters considered within this proposal."

1600

Speaker, you can appreciate that an organization representing folks who have \$30 billion in electricity system

infrastructure would like to know who's digging into it and have thoughts and opinions. They shared that they were supportive. They did say other feedback, though.

"As we outlined in our previous submission, we encourage the ministry to provide advanced visibility into locate requests. Currently, when a requestor submits a 'work to begin date' more than 10 days in advance," Ontario One Call's "system will suspend the request, and then only bring the request back online 10 days before the work needs to begin. This function doesn't give LDCs a line of sight into projects in the queue because the requests are sitting in suspension until they hit the 10-day trigger. We recommend removing this operational hurdle to give LDCs earlier visibility of those advanced locate requests and allow them time to plan resources accordingly." Well, that makes sense.

"We also welcome the opportunity to continue engagement with the ministry and OOC to further refine the categorization of locate types and the associated completion times as OOC's system evolves and offers more flexibility. As OOC makes changes to its system and potentially more data stratification is available, it would be beneficial to further separate very large projects and consider excluding them from the AMPs regime given they can be delivered using the dedicated locator model."

I'll read one other part that they have shared here: "We wish to reiterate our appreciation to OOC for its collaborative work with the sector and the government's leadership in continuing to build Ontario." How often has it been in the last 10 years that I stand here and am able to share that industry partners and others have said that there was actually a collaborative process with the government? That's good. Keep that up.

There were some other thoughts. People were supportive of what is in this bill. I will share, though, a little bit from the Independent Telecommunications Providers Association. This is from their committee submission:

"The Question of Jurisdiction"—oh, just a second. Hold on. Oh, well, this was interesting. I'll flag this so that the—I figure that there are bureaucrats who will be watching this speech, who understand the guts of some of these comments more than I do at this stage. I'm not a locates expert. I'm learning along with you, Speaker, and other folks at home. One of the things that they have raised is:

"At the outset, as it relates to the regulation of underground infrastructure owned and operated by Canadian carriers, the ITPA submits that the province does not have the necessary jurisdiction to impose regulations on this infrastructure. This underground infrastructure, also known as telecommunications facilities, are under the jurisdiction of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission"—or the CRTC. "In its letter dated 10 February 2023, regarding the province's administrative penalty regulations, the ITPA raised the issue of jurisdiction and requested a formal response from the province that provides the legal basis for provincial regulation of underground infrastructure in light of the

settled fact of federal jurisdiction over telecommunications facilities in Canada. To date, the ITPA has not received a response to this request. The ITPA reiterates its request for a formal response from the province."

Interesting. I won't speak to the merit of their challenge or their question here, but they're waiting for a response, and that's a matter of jurisdiction. Maybe answer their letter.

Anyway, it says, "However, as it is currently structured, the system is open to gaming by the excavation industry. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that the environment on excavator side of the locate regime is the equivalent of the 'wild, wild west'."

Some of the challenges raised here is that excavators abuse the locate request mechanism through poor planning or wilful disregard for any party's interest other than their own. For example, ITPA members report instances where excavators—remember, excavators are the people who want to dig—request locates for both sides of a street and then build on only one side of the street. Excavators order locates too far in advance of actual construction, so that the locate goes "stale," and then request a fresh duplicate locate. Excavators order multiple locates on the same parcel of land. Excavators engage in locate ticket dumping or flooding the system with locate tickets.

Here is an example: A fencing contractor canvassed a neighbourhood providing free quotes and ordered locates for the entire neighbourhood at the same time so the company is in a position to begin construction if one or more homeowners accepts the quote.

These are interesting, very specific examples. But I appreciate that they are raising it because, within the broader provincial framework that seems to be basically agreed upon with Ontario One Call, I think that the folks at Ontario One Call and the government can kind of take that back and figure out, how do we ensure that it's the best use of people's time and safety, and that we don't have actors, in this case, that are maybe taking advantage of the fact that it's free and, as they said, the Wild West? But when we're thinking about massive infrastructure projects or a neighbour who is wanting to do work around their property, this looks like it's the right fit in those cases, especially with these changes.

They raise some other issues because, again, with this Independent Telecommunications Providers Association, these are not the large companies like Enbridge, right? They're independent telecoms folks. They've made a point here: "Unlike large companies such as Enbridge, small business such as ITPA members do not have the capability to flow through costs incurred via the locate regime to a customer base that numbers in the millions. Enbridge's large customer base enables it to limit the cost impact of the regime on a customer-by-customer basis. ITPA members do not have the same luxury," and moreover, unlike ITPA members, Enbridge does not operate in a competitive market.

So remembering the small business piece of this in comparing to some of the big dogs, I think that that needs to inform the continued improvements going forward.

Government members have this submission as well, and they can take a look, but there were a series of thoughtful suggestions by the Independent Telecommunications Providers Association.

We heard from Cogeco: “Cogeco commends the government of Ontario for continuing to address lingering challenges with locates, and for actively engaging with industry stakeholders throughout the process that led to the tabling of Bill 153.” They say, “The passage of Bill 153 will play a crucial role in expediting broadband deployment, which will support the government’s objective of achieving full connectivity by 2025.”

I’m so excited to talk about broadband. But even more than that, I would really love for the government to reassure me that we are ever, in my lifetime—pages, in your lifetime—going to see broadband across the province, because, to be reminded of the government’s stated objective of having that full connectivity before the next election, by 2025, if that’s right, I don’t think that this bill has been what’s standing in the way. We don’t see the broadband yet. You can tell me it’s coming, but we haven’t seen the dollars get spent. I’ll talk about that in a bit.

One of the other things that I would say here that Cogeco has raised is they say. “While we support Bill 153, we would like to seize this opportunity to remind the government that significant labour shortages in the locating industry are causing significant delays in the fulfillment of infrastructure projects across Ontario. The recent launch of the Accelerated High Speed Internet Program has brought about an increased demand for locates, thereby exacerbating an already precarious situation. In the last year, a number of Cogeco’s broadband expansion projects were put on hold for many months due to a shortage of locators. If left unaddressed, this underlying issue will continue to have negative impacts on all underground infrastructure owners and excavators.

“We encourage the government to continue addressing labour shortages across the locating industry, particularly through investments in skills training.”

So those are some thoughtful suggestions, and I think it’s stuff we’ve talked about in this room before, but what I had just said is that this particular bill isn’t going to help us get the broadband faster. Recognizing that someone in the business, Cogeco in this case, has said that in addition to this bill, we need to focus on labour shortages and some of those challenges, right—that’s outside of this bill, but a next step for us to keep working with, because broadband matters a lot. I know that we all sing that same song. We want to make sure that we get there.

1610

Actually, while I’m talking about broadband, let’s review a couple of stats here. The government has announced significant spending. Everybody across party lines has been in agreement that this is what is needed. Whether we’re talking about agricultural business needing the connectivity, kids at home doing their homework, small-business folks working from home, all of us in this space—no matter where we look, from banking to

libraries, our world is online, and we have that need to have broadband expanded.

I had raised concerns in this chamber, and I continue to have them, about the last-mile connection. So even if we get broadband from this government, if it is indeed coming, I worry about the last-mile folks. What I mean by that is the rural or—it’s not always that remote or rural, but the folks that it isn’t lucrative for the big broadband companies to connect them. They’re not making the money on it, so who is going to chase them and make sure that it happens?

We’ve had reassurances from this government that it will, it will, it will, but the contracts have gone to the bigger Internet service providers and not the local smaller Internet service providers. Now, they may be contracted for some of that work but, again, by the bigger ones. They couldn’t even get into the process. We understand that many of them had to sign non-disclosure agreements to even be able to get that initial information to be able to get into the bidding process or find out about it. And those regions, the parcels of land—some of the smaller Internet service providers, which might be local and do an excellent job in our community, can’t compete. If they look at that map chunk and say, “Wait a second, we don’t have the infrastructure, the equipment or the human resources to be able to serve that whole area. I guess I can’t bid. I can’t compete on that”—whereas they would be fantastic in their smaller home community and have a vested interest, both because they have a business reputation and because it’s their neighbours—maybe their neighbours in Nickel Belt—that they want to connect. So it’s been a process that—I have been disappointed to see that a lot of them were knocked out initially.

But when I look at the money that’s been allocated—and I take us back in time to estimates and looking at public accounts—the 2022-23 interim actual for rural broadband infrastructure was \$76.7 million. That was just 11% of the previous year’s \$693-million broadband budget. So that was an underspending, and it was an underspending problem that started before that, okay? There have been lots of announcements. There has been very little action on the ground that we can point to. The government can correct me if they can show where that money has been going or flowing, but what we’re seeing is, according to the public accounts, this government spent only 3.6% of its \$405.6-million broadband budget. In 2021-22, 3.6% was spent. It spent only 1.37% of its broadband budget in the 2020-21 year and spent zero the year before that.

So we’ve got four straight years in which the government has failed to spend the vast majority of its broadband budget.

Back in February 2023, so a year ago, at that time, the government had underspent on infrastructure by \$700 million, including broadband and ICIP projects, which were delayed. Now, that was a year ago. Let’s flash forward to this February: the third-quarter finances—this is February 2024—a \$451-million decrease in planned expenditures due to an updated construction schedule for

the broadband program. This is an in-year cut to planned broadband spending of nearly 70%. I have no idea how much the government will actually end up spending—maybe all of it; we're only in Q3. Again, the government is failing to spend the broadband expansion money. Evidently, the government has its priorities, and we stand here hoping to be reassured with evidence, but what we see is a focus on spending public dollars on Therme's luxury spa at Ontario Place, but we don't see the connectivity; we don't see the broadband. Rural folks who are waiting so patiently for broadband—I wonder when they're going to finally notice and start getting mad. The government might start spending money on broadband when that happens.

Back to talking about locates and calling before you dig: As Cogeco, who does the work and is in the broadband and in the Internet business, has said, there's some human resource pieces and labour shortages but there's not anything in this particular bill that is holding up broadband—not specific to this. I wouldn't say that's a missed opportunity. I haven't heard from either any on the excavator side or the industry side that there's a challenge with locates in regard to that.

I had mentioned earlier that Enbridge had kind of—I won't say “threatened,” but there had been talk that there was going to be a \$200 per locate and for every relocate request, which was looming. They rescinded that or they clarified that that was not going to happen. Again, back to this bill and what's actually in this bill: There can't be fees, so that can't happen.

Speaker, we've talked about the industry side of things. One of the things that I will mention is that the backlog of getting locates is really challenging to smaller communities, more rural communities. When we knew that this bill was coming back to the House for third reading and through committee, we had a conversation—and talking to my colleague from Nickel Belt, there are a lot of folks in rural communities that when they pick up the phone and want to call to get those locates and make sure it's safe to dig, it's unbelievable how long it takes. If that's the case, if they pick up the phone and call Ontario One Call and they've got to wait too long, they're going to not call or they're just going to move forward, and we all cross our fingers.

I think that if Ontario One Call can take that back and do the math on how to make sure, on the customer service side, that the actual residential locates process is faster—and I think that maybe speaks to the labour shortage. That may be a part of it, but we've got to make sure that we do things safely.

Speaker, this bill, as I have said, is called the Building Infrastructure Safety Act. People in Ontario want infrastructure built. People in Ontario want that infrastructure to meet their needs. They want it to reflect what it is that communities or cities are asking for, are needing, what they depend on. They want to know that their roads are going to be safe to travel on and not deteriorate. They want to know that buildings, whether they're residential, a hospital or a mall, are not going to fall down around them,

that it's going to stand the test of time—all of that, right? We want infrastructure physically to be built safely, but we also need infrastructure to be built based on plans, not just whims. I think that sounds like common sense and yet.

When we see rushed process, we see less safety. I have an article here, and I am happy to bring it back and share it again because it's one that I still just shake my head about, and I know there are some members in this room who remember when I shared it the first time and probably enjoyed it not as much as I did. Regarding minister's zoning orders, it's entitled “Ford Government Forced to Fix Rushed Zoning Order That Put Tower on Flight Path.” This is a Global News piece, November 2023: “The Ford government was forced to scale back a minister's zoning order after the developer was given permission to build a skyscraper right in the middle of the flight path of Pearson International Airport, sources told Global News, after a rushed process.

1620

“Months after it was issued, the zoning order was quietly amended when airport officials told the government it couldn't allow a 50-storey tower to be built on a flight path utilized by hundreds of aircraft.”

Now, I will be fair that I don't know it was that obvious. I'm not making excuses, but I don't think it was a really busy flight path. My understanding is it might have been a bit of an emergency, once-in-a-while flight path.

The point still stands that if you're going to build a 50-storey tower, you would hope that by the time it comes to you to approve, there are plans and due diligence has been done. When we have a rushed process, we have problems, and we have embarrassing headlines. Fortunately, we don't have people living in a flight path or we don't have office workers in a flight path, and fortunately, we don't have emergency flights having to go around a surprise building.

Now, it says, “The gaffe is likely to draw more scrutiny to the province's use of minister's zoning orders or MZO, a controversial tool that allows the province to overrule and replace planning decisions made by local councils.”

Speaker, I see it. I see it often. I see it locally. All of us know Orchard Villa. We've heard that name. I don't think we'll hear that name much going forward except by the families and except by the people who want to remember it. But the people who want to turn the page—corporate entities, perhaps this government—it's being rebranded. The government, in an MZO, is allowing for a 30-year licence extension, a whole whack of new beds and a rebuild and a rebrand. And the care that had been provided by Extencare—in the military reports, people died; it was awful. Extencare is not in the mix anymore. It's a whole new company to provide the care. In fact, it's a company that, to the best of my knowledge, has never existed before, has no track record and is connected, I believe, to the building owners, to Southbridge homes. It's called “south care” or “Southbridge care,” something like that.

Anyway, in all of this, we're talking about building infrastructure safely, but we also want infrastructure to be

built for safety. We've got loved ones in long-term care. I have stood in this place and said that that building, that process has been a mistake. The Pickering council, and I know Pickering council—there's politics all over the place in Durham region and relationships all around this room, and that's fine. That's going to happen. Welcome to Ontario. But that council said that they had wishes and that MZO ran roughshod over them. It was against what the council had wanted. And now we have the families—the families of Orchard Villa and the Ontario Health Coalition have taken legal action against this government in trying to prevent this 30-year licence extension.

So we want infrastructure built, but we need it to be safe, and we want the reassurances that—look, if the government wants to say that Southbridge has now turned over a new leaf and they're magic and sunshine and they have made all of the changes and they're going to be awesome and care is just going to be top-notch, why are they still even willing to risk a 30-year gamble on that assumption? Right? They don't have the track record to back up 30 years. I'm not standing here saying, "We'll give them a five-year one and then we'll re-evaluate." This has been a reward for poor behaviour, but without something to point to that justifies it or reassures communities.

So while this bill might be about locates, we are watching decisions being made that are going around the planning process, a rushed process. We definitely have safety in mind in the Durham region. The Pickering community—but it's not only Pickering. Families in my riding have loved ones that were at Orchard Villa.

I'm talking about 50-storey towers that might have been built right in the middle of a flight path to Pearson airport. I'm talking about long-term-care buildings; we want to ensure that the government has done its homework to make sure that there will be safe care. There's lots to talk about. When we see infrastructure being built, we want to know that it's being built well and with safety in mind.

This is a government that has such—I was going to say "obsession," but they have such commitment. This government has made such a commitment to P3s and building things with the P3 model, and ideologically I am opposed to big giant consortiums who get to take the reins and make decisions and we don't get to put eyes on projects mid-game. How do we know, when the province puts together a contract with a big financial consortium who hires everybody and all the contractors—they do this and they say, "Trust us. We're going to build something, and I promise it will be on budget and on time." But then it's not, and we pay a 30% premium to be able to transfer the risk to the private sector and off the public. That's the best the Auditor General can rationalize this 30% premium that we pay for P3s.

But when often we see these massive projects be super delayed and way over budget—let's think for a minute. These massive financial consortiums, it's not in their best interest to deliver on budget or on time. It's in their best interest to drag their feet and make more money, fundamentally.

The other problem is, it's in this black box or behind the P3 curtain, where I've seen people in this Legislature ask the former Minister of Transportation, "Why is this project over budget?" or "What's happening? What's the delay?" And we don't, as a government, have the ability to get those answers. I didn't see her able to get those answers. I think more broadly—not that minister—when we sign our rights away to peek behind the curtain, and just get the project back at the end, we don't get to know, and that's a problem. We're talking about building infrastructure safely. How do you know it's safe?

I've got an hour to kill, so why not: I remember when I was the critic for community safety and correctional services, and I would show up at jails—the front door, by the way—and do surprise tours. I went to, I think—I'd have to look at my notes—17 of our provincial jails, and a number of probation and parole offices.

I remember being at the Toronto South Detention Centre getting a tour—and this is super in the weeds, but I don't care. That building was built as a P3, and when I got the tour, walking around both with the management side and the union side, they were pointing out physical things in this jail that were so dumb—and when I say "dumb," I mean so dumb, like design things that were just dumb: Where the drains were in the showers, they weren't built with the right grade, so the water was running into living areas instead of into the drain; they had to put towels on the floor. It was just things where you think, "Have you never built a floor before?"

There were other challenges that I remember—and I still don't know who paid for this; maybe some bureaucrat wants to send me a note who paid for this. But there were areas in that jail where inmates are transported from one section to another, so it was still inmate areas. It was found out after it was handed back after the P3, after they had commissioned this jail, did all the contracts—bought and paid for; the jail comes back to provincial hands—there were inmate areas where the glass was breakable. Breakable glass, and they were like, "Oh, no. That's not safe."

Do you know what? It turned out that in the contract, we the government or whatever had not specified that it needed to be not-breakable glass. Even though it was a jail, they did it to condo specs in that section. I remember thinking, "What are you talking about?" This is so in the weeds, and it's a bit absurd that I'm telling this story. All of that breakable glass in the jail had to be replaced, and we're on the hook for it because we didn't specify that it not be condo spec in that one section—super nitty-gritty and ridiculous. But you extrapolate that nugget to massive infrastructure projects—billions of dollars—where we don't have access to those contracts, and we just have to trust that they were done well.

1630

I've spent a lot of time at committee talking about real estate—and I don't mean today; that's a different bill. I'm talking about the realty portfolio specific to hospitals years ago—and it was the same thing that we were asking Ehren Cory at the time, who was the head of Infrastructure

Ontario: “Have you learned your lessons about how to write contracts for these P3s and the hospitals?” We kept getting into messes. I remember being sort of reassured with, “Yes, we are looking at the lessons that we learned.” Oh, my gosh.

So are we still signing contracts where we are not specifying jail glass instead of condo glass, and then the taxpayer is on the hook for 30 years of maintenance of this glass and replacing it? I’m in the weeds.

This bill is called Building Infrastructure Safely Act. I think when you involve the public, folks who know what they are talking about, rather than the private consortium—their goal is to make money for their investors. Why would they do things well? Why would they do things on time? Why would they do things on budget?

I’m surprised I’m not getting yelled at more that I’m against P3s—and that’s what they tuck themselves in with at night. Still, this is the Building Infrastructure Safely Act, and I get to raise in my hour lead other things to consider for how to build infrastructure safely.

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: And the member from Kitchener–Conestoga—I appreciate his enthusiasm for my one-hour lead.

Speaker, as we’re talking about building infrastructure safely, I would like to raise a couple of points that have been raised by a member of my community. His name is Jim McEwen. I imagine that there are members of the government who have also received letters from Jim through the years. He sends lots of emails and has thoughtful comments. He has been raising an issue, I think, with all members across Durham region about the Bowmanville GO expansion. I’m looking across at my colleague from the riding of Durham. We are excited about the GO train to Bowmanville. We want the Bowmanville GO train. We want it, and I have been reassured it’s coming. I don’t want to cast aspersions. I want it just as much as everybody else across Durham region, and I want it built safely.

So I’m going to raise his challenges because I’ve raised it when I talked directly to Metrolinx, and I get no reassurance. I have raised this in this House, and everybody looks at me and thinks, “I wonder if that’s a real thing?” And I get no reassurance. So I’m going to do it again.

Jim McEwen has written to me and written to the folks at Metrolinx and government members, and this is just a piece of one of his letters. He said, “Knowing of how restricted the topography is in west Oshawa, please explain to me how Metrolinx/Stantec plan to build the new railway link between the Oshawa station and the bridge over Hwy. 401 to a grade of 1-2 per cent and while utilizing a horizontal curve in compliance with national railway standards? A passenger train cannot make a sharp 90 degree turn as suggested in your documents....”

“And please do not hide behind the design/build process, because as the proponent and in accordance with the Ontario EA Act, Metrolinx has a duty to prove engineering feasibility with your recommended solutions.”

That is a lot of specific stuff, and when I have met with Metrolinx and said, “Please put my mind at ease, because I have got an inbox full from Mr. McEwen raising specifics around the safety of this curve, the angles, the type of train—the diesel train.”

He said, “A diesel locomotive cannot descend a 4 per cent grade and make a sharp 90 degree turn into the existing Oshawa station.” And it goes on with more specifics.

To date, I am unaware of a response that puts his mind at ease, or mine.

In fact, continuing on from there, when I have spoken to them at Metrolinx, I’ve said, “I read in the news that you don’t have any engineers on staff.” They don’t. They have told me that they contract engineers as needed. Fine. Hopefully, there’s an engineer who can ensure that this train that is going to be travelling over the 401, not too far from where I live, actually, in Oshawa—and we’re watching the bridge happen. Can somebody just say, “Yes, don’t worry, Oshawa and everybody on the train. Someone has done due diligence?”

Mr. Mike Harris: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Point of order: the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: I’m wondering if we’re all on the same page here today, in talking about Bill 153. It just seems like the member is really straying off into a lot of different topics, when we actually should be debating the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act and the very short five-page red tape cleanup that is part of this bill. I honestly haven’t really heard her talk much about it. So I’m hoping she’s going to be able to get back on track and that you could see that we’re here debating this bill today.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I’ll allow the member to continue, under the Building Infrastructure Safely—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): —to what you were talking about, please.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. Speaker, first of all, I’m going to appreciate the member from Kitchener–Conestoga getting up and giving me a chance to have some water and to hopefully try to get my cough under control. Thank you. I thought that was very collegial.

As far as the point of order that he raised, in this hour lead, I have been very glad to be able to stay very close to the title. If the government wanted to name it “only talk about locates,” then, yes, I’d be limited. But the government chose to call this bill Building Infrastructure Safely Act. So I’m excited to have that opportunity to talk about ways to build infrastructure safely.

In the first 40 minutes or so, I was very happy to be able to “dig deep” into the locates topic—

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Love that.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you.

Anyway, the Building Infrastructure Safely Act is, yes, about locates. I’ve had 40 minutes to talk about that. But when we’re wanting to build infrastructure safely, we want

to stop skipping planning steps; we want to see environmental assessments; we want folks to call before they dig. That's an NDP collaboration from back in the day with Sarnia–Lambton, as I talked about earlier. But we also want to hire engineers—

Mr. Mike Harris: Paul Miller.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Where's Paul?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate the concern for former members. I am sure that the former member who brought this bill forward calls before he digs.

God, I'm really sorry to folks—

Mr. Mike Harris: I can point-of-order you again, if you want.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I don't need to be point-of-ordered again. I've got six minutes. I'm trying to make it here.

Mr. Mike Harris: You can sit down.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: No. The sooner I sit down, the sooner the government gets to continue doing damage to the province. So I'm staying on my feet.

Speaker, I'm going to digress again—just for the member from Kitchener–Conestoga. I had all morning and all day at committee, where I was also glad to give the government what for on a couple of things and talk. Apparently, I'm out of practice. I did not think that I could talk more than my voice could handle. I've been teaching for many years, and I've been an elected member for 10. I didn't think I'd ever have a problem talking.

Anyway, one of the other pieces I wanted to raise while I've got a couple of minutes is the need for engineers to be more involved or to be involved in processes to—did somebody send me cough drops?

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. Thanks.

1640

Mr. Dave Smith: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Point of order: the member from Peterborough–Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: I was actually just standing up to give the member from Oshawa a bit of time so she could have that cough drop and not have it on camera, and to allow her to continue her speech, because it has been riveting. I was heckling her very early on, but she has captured the audience for the last 55 minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member for Oshawa.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you to all of my colleagues for the cough drops. I don't think I'm sick; we'll find out tomorrow.

Speaker, as we're talking about building infrastructure safely, I wanted to be able to share something from a submission that was made by the Professional Engineers Government of Ontario. These are the folks who are professional engineers who work in different government ministries. PEGO—the Professional Engineers Government of Ontario—members deliver some of the largest infrastructure projects in the province. They write standards, codes and regulations. They approve major industrial projects and enforce and regulate environmental

projects and operations. This includes the provincial highway network, the Ontario building code, land surveying, food safety, workplace safety, safe drinking water—speaking of safe drinking water, thank you, Paras—and clean air.

Speaker, as Ontario grows, its infrastructure and public service needs are growing too, and as we're building our roads and our clean water systems and infrastructure, we want to know that people can rely on them. We want to make sure engineers have eyes on the projects and are involved in the planning.

To my earlier comment: Metrolinx doesn't have any engineers on staff. I forget how many executives they've got and whatnot, but they don't have engineers. They contract those out.

The Professional Engineers Government of Ontario work across government ministries to make sure that the government does things well and that we have infrastructure, we have projects that somebody who knows what the metrics should be and knows what the safety requirements are—that they have been involved. For example, I don't think there are any who work in the Ministry of Energy; somebody can correct me, but that's my understanding. That's a little scary. But they are much less expensive than contracting out to the private sector. For every dollar that's spent on the professional engineers in the government, we spend more than \$10 on the private sector. About 30 years ago, they did about 40% of the engineering work in Ontario; now, based on the figures, it looks like less than 5%. That means that we—you as a government, but we as a province—are now contracting out and not relying on in-house, which surprises me. I would think the government would want information, knowledge and wisdom to be in-house. It means that private sector engineers are often compensated double the rate of the engineers who work in the government of Ontario. They charge 200% to 300% more for the same work of this government.

This government is always looking for ways to be more efficient, but let's also look at that efficiency coming with safety. If you compare that work, why on earth wouldn't you want that engineering expertise, the industry expertise, to be in-house? Maybe the government would have less opportunities to repeal all of their good ideas if they actually did their due diligence.

Anyway, as I am looking at the clock, I will say I am finally coming to the end of this one-hour lead, which is the second one-hour speech on locates I have given as the very proud and enthusiastic critic for infrastructure, transportation and highways.

I think that the take-away from this and all legislation that has to do with building infrastructure is that we want it done well. Yes, people want it done quickly and they want it done predictably. They want a start date and an end date that they can count on. The government has a lot of improving to do in that regard. But where this piece of legislation is concerned, I will say it is a novel thing to be able to stand in this House and say that I hear there was a collaborative process and consultation went well, that

industry and community stakeholders were in agreement with what is presented in this bill. That sounds like a new way—kind of an old-fashioned way—of governing, and I would like to see more pieces of legislation that actually went through a process and out the other side.

Speaker, I'm a little bit early, but I am glad to be finished my hour and to again have my voice on the record.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I thank the member for Oshawa for her thorough, one-hour address to this House.

Two years before the member for Oshawa was elected, in 2014, through a collaborative effort of this House—the minority Parliament of 2011 to 2014—the original Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act was enacted unanimously, as I understand it. There have been many changes to the act since then to keep up with the significant changes and the need to address the growing and dynamic needs of our province.

We have, in here, an expansion of the dedicated locator model—no personal liability for employees and directors and officers of the corporation—as well, we have a call centre in northern Ontario proposed, as well as the banning of locate fees.

Do I take the member's comments—and I thought I heard some hopeful ones at the end. Is the member prepared to support this bill on third reading, and if so, why?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It's always more fun to leave them hanging.

As I have said, this is a bill that came forward initially—so, many moons ago, the private members' bill that was a collaborative effort between the member from Sarnia–Lambton and the former member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. There is nothing contentious in this bill; there wasn't in that private members' bill.

When you talk about the northern call centre—I just want to flag for the minister the comments from the member from Nickel Belt and others who have highlighted the challenges of northern community members and One Call, or getting those locates inside a timely way. That continues to be on a case-by-case basis. There are still improvements to be made, but that's outside of this bill.

Everything I've heard from folks, with the few exceptions I highlighted, seems supportable. We'll have to wait and see.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I would like to thank the member from Oshawa for her presentation and making it through.

It seems to me, as we look at Bill 153, this is the third time in fewer than two years that the government has made changes to the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act. I believe there were also earlier changes made through Bill 23, as well as other pieces of legislation.

Did the government not consult properly on these earlier changes, and is that a reason that this is yet another example of sort of backpedalling to clean up?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It's totally a fair question based on what we have seen, but I will say, I don't think so. I actually think that the initial challenges that were raised were dealt with as they came up. That's what I've been told by Ontario One Call and other industry stakeholders. They have been involved in the process as it has unfolded, and issues are raised as they are discovered. That's what my take-away was.

I'm telling you that not to be able to defend something the government is doing, but to be able to say to the government, "Look what happens when you learn from people who do the work. You get a piece of legislation that we don't crumple up and throw back at you and that you won't have to repeal." Anyway, they're lessons for everyone.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you to the member from Oshawa. I know that she struggled through her remarks because she was coughing and had a sore throat. That happens from time to time, especially when you have an hour-long leadoff—well done to get through that.

I just want to point out to the member opposite, there were a few opportunities there where I saw—you talked about One Call. Obviously, that was led by the member from Sarnia–Lambton and has been respected, so it is a requirement to deal with One Call.

You talked a little bit about Ontario Place, and I've been sitting here listening for the last year and a half to some of the things that I feel are very untrue about that site. I know the Minister of Infrastructure is working very diligently with Infrastructure Ontario in order to make sure that there's value for dollars and it is a place for all Ontarians and Canadians, but also that we fulfill our duties on there.

1650

Finally, we talked about this airspace and the MZO which never actually really occurred. So I think there have been a number of areas—and I don't know how this misinformation has gotten through so that it would make it through to a speech on the floor of the assembly, but I would like to just point out to the member that she may want to correct—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to the member.

The member for Oshawa.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pretty sure she's not allowed to suggest that I am doing misinformation, but, Speaker, if you're going to let her, then I guess I will.

A few things: The Ontario Place stuff—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to the member from Oshawa.

I'll caution the member in her use of "misinformation."

Ms. Jennifer K. French: With the Minister of Infrastructure—man, if there is value for money and if the government has been doing homework, share it. We would

love to see it. The thing is, the contracts—it's all confidential and this and that, but it doesn't make us trust, and everything is going to be hidden. So I don't know what kind of information it is; it's information we're not allowed to have.

However, what the member suggested was misinformation that came to the floor—that story, “Ford Government Forced to Fix Rushed Zoning Order that Put Tower on Flight Path.” I'm referring to a Global News piece posted on November 6, 2023. It explained the whole thing about the rushed process, what happened. It's a three-pager. So if it's misinformation, please let Isaac Callan and Colin D'Mello know.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to congratulate my very knowledgeable colleague the member for Oshawa for walking us through the legislation that's before us today, the Building Infrastructure Safely Act. She made some comments regarding the locate requests that are affected by this legislation, and those locate requests are other than dedicated locator requests that are related to designated broadband projects. She made some comments about this government's track record on implementing broadband throughout Ontario.

I wondered if she wanted to elaborate a little bit more on the government's progress in achieving its broadband goals.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm not going to say that they're not working towards the broadband goals, because I do believe that every member of this House wants to see that happen. The money has not been flowing, so it would be interesting for the government to share a bit more about what's in the way. This bill is not in the way. Locates and the changes in here are not in the way. There may be some pieces that connect, but when we look at the third-quarter finances and the \$451-million decrease in planned expenditures due to an updated construction schedule for the broadband program, perhaps the government could elaborate a little bit more on what that process is looking like and how it's going to unfold.

Everybody in here is rooting for broadband for everyone. So the fact that we have seen this pattern of underspending—why? How come?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: I'll just touch on the broadband issue since it has been brought up. We've had over a dozen projects in and around Waterloo region that have actually been funded and come forward and have been approved, and many have been completed. So it is really great, I think, when we talk about all members in this House wanting to see broadband expanded affordably across the province for everyone—it's really great to see that there are many of those projects that have moved forward.

I did, in the spirit of bipartisanship—and it looks like we're having a good, sort of healthy debate today. Being from North Bay, some will say it's northern Ontario; some will say maybe it's not. If the MPP from Mushkegowuk—

James Bay was here, he'd be razzing me right now about it—oh, sorry; I can't say that. I didn't mean it in a negative way. Apologies, table.

But what do you see as some of the barriers? If you're the critic for this file, what do you see as some of the things that we can work on as government, without the political rhetoric, to bring better service, in particular with the locates in northern Ontario?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Specific to the locates, I don't know, beyond what I've shared. There were some suggestions and a bit of feedback from the independent telecommunications folks and others who weren't looking at it through that big, massive Enbridge-sized lens, and what they would need. They had suggestions specific to this bill.

I think not specific to this bill but to broadband generally: When you're working with municipalities or regions that have suggestions, sometimes government can be almost too rigid. If they're looking for applications on a particular funding thing, then innovative ideas might not fit and then we miss an opportunity. I have examples of that that I'm hearing from communities about ways to make things better. We need to make sure that those ideas can move forward.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Brian Riddell: Thank you to all the members in this House who have contributed to the debate on this bill. I would like to thank the member from Oshawa for her comments. One thing I really enjoy is seeing both sides of the House work together.

I'm very pleased to rise today to in support of Bill 153, the Building Infrastructure Safely Act, 2023. I know many members in this House have indicated their support, and we look forward to hearing from them as well.

I want to second the minister in acknowledging all parties involved in this extensive consultation held by the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery, Ontario One Call and the Ministry of Energy to bring Bill 153 to the point it is today.

As part of the development of this bill, many stakeholders, including underground infrastructure owners and operators, excavators and developers, were engaged. With the hard work and dedication of public and business service delivery officials and One Call staff, we were able to craft the bill and lead stakeholder consultations throughout. These consultations emphasized the need to modernize Ontario's locate delivery framework as well as invest in the future. They underlined how important it is for us to improve locate delivery service and find a balance that minimizes financial impacts and burdens on industry while enhancing safety, which is key for workers and the overall public.

The minister shared in detail about the proposed legislation and its many measures: prohibiting owners and operators of underground infrastructure from charging to provide locates and aligning Ontario One Call powers and responsibilities with those of other administrative authorities.

I would like to take some time to review a couple of the ways this bill is vital to our communities and to Ontario's overall growth. When the government's fall economic statement came out in November last year, I believe its title said it all: Building a Strong Ontario Together. That's our number one goal. As our Minister of Finance said at the time, we must keep investing to build the critical infrastructure to support growing communities across Ontario. Ontario needs new infrastructure, from affordable housing to new public transportation, roads and broadband Internet that reaches every corner of our wonderful province.

The Minister of Finance also laid out our government's plans for the new Ontario Infrastructure Bank, which will help to drive investment participation so that we can deliver more infrastructure faster. This starts priority areas such as long-term-care homes, affordable housing and infrastructure in the municipal, community, energy and transportation sectors. We owe it to the people of Ontario today and we owe it to our future generations to build this critical infrastructure, to get it done.

As the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery said earlier today, Ontario's population is growing by half a million people a year, and we're creating hundreds of thousands of new jobs. That's wonderful news, but it's no news that to support all that growth, we need more housing and we need vital infrastructure like transit, roads, schools and high-speed Internet.

The road ahead is clear: We must find new ways to build that essential infrastructure while maintaining public safety. Building Ontario means putting investments and infrastructure in place to strengthen local economies and communities across the province now and in the future. That is why Ontario has made a historical commitment of \$185 billion over the next 10 years.

1700

Since last year and continuing in 2024, \$20.7 billion has been put toward the most ambitious capital plan in Ontario's history to build highways, roads, transit, hospitals, long-term-care homes, schools, child care spaces, broadband and other critical infrastructure, so it's touching everything.

Some of you may be wondering how does the Building Infrastructure Safety Act, 2024, fit into the larger picture. The answer is right under your feet. Any time we break ground for a house or a highway or any time we dig, from a small-scale operation like planting a tree to something major like a subway tunnel, we must first identify what infrastructure is buried there. That includes natural gas, high-voltage electrical cables, water, sewer and telecommunications. They're all right there, right beneath us. And if we want to build infrastructure to meet the needs of our growing population, we need to put in the work. We need to work smart and, most of all, we need to work safe. As a provincial government, that means implementing policies that foster growth sustainably and, most importantly, safely. We must lead and we must continue to work closely with municipalities, private sector partners and community stakeholders.

Speaker, this brings us to why all Ontarians are required to obtain locates before they start to dig on projects of any size. You think about it: A broadband line is only a foot under the ground. You cut that line, you could shut down a whole neighbourhood for a week.

Ontario One Call is an administrative authority. It is responsible for coordinating requests from excavators to locate underground infrastructure. One Call plays a vital role in enhancing overall industry performance and ensuring public safety on excavation projects. They play a vital role in raising awareness about responsibilities under the act, working collaboratively to meet a shared goal of public safety and compliance with the law.

One Call's main objective is to promote safe digging practices and increase the efficiency, timeliness and coordination of locate delivery to ensure public safety for all.

If passed, Bill 153 would help to improve the system for identifying the location of underground infrastructure, or "locates," and support the vital infrastructure development that Ontario needs so dearly. Most importantly, these changes would maintain Ontario's strictest safety standards, because safety is our number one goal.

Before shovels can go into the ground, we need to make sure that critical safety steps are taken. Locating underground infrastructure helps prevent damage to our entire network of underground infrastructure and reduces the risk to public safety.

I remember, and this is a long time ago, when I was a kid, there was a house at the end of the street. An excavator came in and was digging in the front of that house. It hit a gas line, and about 15 minutes later, that house was no longer there. I've always remembered that my whole life. Thank God we have One Call today.

Ontario workers need to be assured that they are as protected as they can be when they are out there building, anywhere, working in our great province. These hard-working and dedicated skilled trade workers put their lives and livelihoods on the line every time they go on that job to help make sure we have roads, sewers, homes and telecommunications. We owe it to them to create work environments that are as safe as possible. And that's why providing locate services at no cost is so important.

By helping to keep these costs down for construction projects, it removes a potential cost barrier to people complying with the public safety requirement to call or click before they dig. We simply do not want there to be any financial disincentives to safety. Safety is paramount. By prohibiting owners and operators of underground infrastructure from charging fees for providing locates, we would minimize public safety risks that would happen and align with long-standing industry practices in Canada and the United States by enshrining it into law.

Speaker, our government knows how much depends on solid infrastructure. The economy growth for the entire province relies on it by allowing businesses to operate and create jobs, connecting our communities and promoting the exchange of goods and services. Well-developed infrastructure reduces the effects of geographical distances

and helps our fellow citizens access employment, health care and education that we all need to prosper in this province. This legislation would help usher in a safer, more efficient, cost-effective approach to building critical infrastructure in our great province.

This is our government's forward-looking agenda to meet the challenges of tomorrow as we look to build capacity for Ontario to grow and succeed for generations to come. Many of my colleagues have said this before, and I will reiterate it again: This bill is part of a pledge that we have made to the people of Ontario to make our province the best place to work, live and play. And that means ensuring the continued success of Ontario One Call and the vital roles it performs so we can all benefit from sustainable, safe infrastructure development today and tomorrow.

I strongly urge all members of the House to support this bill and I look forward to continued discussion on how we can build a stronger Ontario together.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member opposite for his debate portion. I expected it to go another 10 minutes, but I guess they're going to be doing short debates for the rest of the afternoon.

There definitely have been concerns, and I see that this bill removes—will not charge for certain locate requests, but they also won't be required to pay compensation for the missed deadlines.

When a build is happening, as you can imagine, there are several contractors coming in from several different places, and the need to coordinate all of those contractors becomes difficult. So if we have a company that doesn't show up to do the locates that are necessary, what is the penalty to them for not showing up and to not keep that appointment?

Could the member speak to why something like that isn't in this legislation, to protect the builders in these circumstances?

Mr. Brian Riddell: On a construction site or any type of operation, there's going to be one company coordinating that operation, and it's up to them to make sure that everybody involved, that they're going to be using for that operation, is involved and the service can be provided safely.

The whole secret behind this is that it speeds things up in a safe manner, and that's what it's all about.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the parliamentary assistant for his remarks. I spent a lot of time on the phone with Ontario One Call, and truly, it being brought into force in Ontario is actually a tremendous positive given how difficult it was to understand what is actually underground—for a common person to know whether they have wires, a pipeline. There are all kinds of materials down there.

Speaker, I wanted to ask, given that both our economy and our population continue to see unprecedented growth, not just of our population, but really of the kind of work

that is needed, year after year—and we really need to accommodate our modern economy. It's important to land some of the industry that we want to attract to Ontario, and we want to see increased productivity. This whole legislation was going to do that, and we have a goal to build 1.5 million new homes.

So I wanted to ask the question of how this legislation can help facilitate construction in the province of Ontario and support builders as they work alongside us to build a strong and prosperous province.

1710

Mr. Brian Riddell: My background is industrial engineering, and when I look at that—like I said, what are some of the costs that are wasted? And the wastes are when I look at something that's delayed. This eliminates that issue. We can speed up development, we can coordinate it better, and we can make it happen. As I stated in my statement about getting it done, this gets it done.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: It's always a privilege to be able to rise and to get in depth in the conversation on Bill 153, Building Infrastructure Safely Act.

My question is to the colleague across the way there. With the bill proposing major changes for the third time in less than two years, can the government clarify the rationale behind these frequent amendments? How do these changes address the concerns missed in Bill 93 and in Bill 23, particularly regarding stakeholder consultations? I'm not sure if there is a relevant question about the lack of comprehensive consultation the first time around.

Mr. Brian Riddell: I always like the Japanese word "kaizen." Kaizen means constant improvement. So what we did 10 years ago to today, we can improve, and I think that's a good thing. If we move ahead and we improve systems and we improve procedures and standards, that's a good thing for this province. Like I said, we can get things built faster, we can get things built safer, and like the accident that I told you about—that won't happen. So this is all good.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I'd like to thank the member from Cambridge for his remarks. Specifically, I like how you brought into your speech your own incident that you witnessed or you knew was a big danger. With that being the case, we know that we need to ensure public safety and that our people remain safe at all times.

I wanted to talk about the businesses and the industries that will greatly benefit from this proposed change, like construction firms, telecommunications providers, locators, excavators. My question is, can the member please tell us the full impact of this legislation? How will it impact Ontarians, and what are the major benefits that it will provide?

Mr. Brian Riddell: I think the most important thing is safety for the people of Ontario and for the people living around wherever that locate might be done. They'll know

what's there when they dig. That's important. For the people doing the work, like the construction people. They're important. I think, like you mentioned, whether it's telecommunications, whether it's sewer lines, whether it's water lines, whether it's gas lines or anything else that's underneath there, that's going to save the province and those companies a lot of money because there's not going to be the damage that could be done by an excavator digging something up.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I understand that the bill removes the requirement that the owners of infrastructure pay compensation when they miss deadlines. Now, there's been a lot of debate, so I apologize if I've missed something along the way, but we do know that a lot of northern communities talk about making the one call but then waiting and waiting and waiting. They'll try and back step and call the actual utility and so on, or people call the MPP's office. I'm just wondering if there's anything in the bill that actually calls One Call to account or the utilities to account if they continually miss deadlines.

Mr. Brian Riddell: Thank you for your question. As far as a penalty, they have 10 days, I believe, to get that job done. And whether they hire a firm like GTel to do it for them—there's a penalty system built into that. But in saying that, it's important, especially in northern Ontario, to get these broadband lines in, and the only way we can do it is by using One Call to put those systems in place and work with those people that are doing the one calls, whether it's GTel, or somebody else, or Enbridge, to get the systems going.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Yes, we have some great projects coming up in the Essex county area: Chatham-to-Lakeshore line, 230 kilovolts; St. Clair line, 230 kilovolts; Longwood-to-Lakeshore line, 500 kilovolts—and the list goes on. There's so much power coming to Essex county because we have so many great projects coming. How will One Call assist all of those people with all of those projects, to get their projects done with all this power coming to Essex county?

Mr. Brian Riddell: So I'm going to phrase this answer like this: Imagine if we didn't have One Call, how difficult it would be to put those lines in, how unsafe it would be for people. And that's the wonder of what we're trying to do.

And I would like to say, I appreciate the other side of this House working with us to get this done, because it's for the greater good of the province of Ontario and for our people who live here. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Chris Glover: I just need a second to do up my button here.

Okay, so it's an honour to rise in the House today to talk about Bill 153, the Building Infrastructure Safely Act. This bill provides some small updates to the Ontario One

Call system. The One Call system is about calling before you dig, or now, in more modern terms, call or click before you dig. This is really vital, everybody who's listening today, that if you're going to be digging in your backyard or anywhere on your property, or if someone is going to be digging, make sure you make that call, because there are utilities buried under the ground and it could be incredibly dangerous if you hit one of those utility lines.

I've got an example from my condo—and this is not exactly a "Call Before You Dig," but it does talk about the importance of knowing where utility lines are. I live in a condo downtown, and I left one day to go to the store. An hour later, I came back and there's water pouring through the pot lights in the foyer of the building and water all over the floor. Apparently what had happened was a plumber had cut the wrong pipe. And cutting that wrong pipe—it's a 32-storey building, so all the water is draining from 32 storeys on that pipe, right? It cost \$300,000 in damage. So call before you dig; make sure—I mean, this was not a "call before you dig," but make sure you know where utility lines are and which utility lines they are before you actually get involved in that.

Let's see. The other one is a story that comes from London, and my colleague from London West may actually know this building. There's a beautiful Edwardian home in London, at 294 Central Avenue, and it's got large bay windows. It's the first and second floor. It's the large bay windows. There's a big dormer. It was built in 1905, and since 1953, it's been the home of the Delta Upsilon fraternity.

Last summer, a contractor was working on the site when he hit a gas line. Firefighters were called and they turned off the gas, but they had to—and everybody should know this, if you're watching at home: Do not put water on a gas fire because gas floats and then you're just spreading the fire further. So they had to let the gas burn off, and at the same time, the firefighters were protecting the building. Fortunately, they were able to do that, so that building is still there today because of the work of the firefighters. But again, that's another example of "call before you dig," because that could have been absolutely devastating and it could have put people's lives at risk as well.

Call before you dig. Make sure that you're getting it done. This government's tag line is "Get it Done." They've got a bill before the House this week that's called "Get it Done," but they should also make sure that you get it right.

1720

When I was looking for stories to go with my speech today, I came across this article from Global News, and the byline is:

"A rushed process

"In May, the province surprised bureaucrats and local politicians at Mississauga city hall when it issued two zoning orders to skip local planning rules on several buildings in the city.

"The announcement blindsided local officials, who were not expecting the MZOs. Between two" MZOs, "the

Ford government doubled the size of a waterfront development to 16,000 units and allowed towers along Hurontario Street.

“The significant changes were announced late on a Friday night by provincial officials, who pushed out the announcement just ahead of the weekend. Local sources in Mississauga told Global News the move was a surprise and bureaucrats found out about the planning changes at the same time as everyone else—when the press release landed.

“It wasn’t just local officials, however, who were left scrambling.

“Sources with knowledge of the provincial process told Global News the request for one building included in the zoning order—a 50-storey tower—came from the developer and was turned around by the Ford government in less than two weeks.”

So this is the government getting it done. They get a request from a developer for a zoning order—“We want to build this 50-storey tower”—and they turn that around in two weeks.

“The order to allow the building near Toronto Pearson airport came through the Premier’s office and was given to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the sources said.”

Then the next byline is:

“Airport forced to take province aside

“After the zoning order was announced, and city staff left scrambling to put the planning direction into action, officials at Toronto Pearson airport were forced to intervene....

“The province was effectively told they had allowed a developer to build a” 50-storey “skyscraper in the middle of a flight path relied upon by the country’s busiest airport,” Pearson.

“In response to feedback from the Greater Toronto Airports Authority ... regarding its proximity to Pearson airport, the former minister amended this MZO to remove the northern site located at 5645 Hurontario Street,” a spokesperson for the Ford government confirmed.”

This is another example of, getting it done is one thing, but getting it right is even more important, because you don’t want to be building or even allowing a 50-storey skyscraper in the middle of a flight path. That’s the kind of mistake that you make when you’re trying to rush things and you’re not actually doing it properly. The purpose of this bill is to actually balance safety and speed, and the airport example is something that the government needs to be working on, because getting it right means that you don’t have to repeal things all the time.

This government has passed many, many pieces of legislation that they’ve then had to repeal—for example, Bill 124. This week, or in this session anyway, the government has announced that it will be repealing Bill 124, and this was the cap on public sector wages. In 2018, when the government got in, they passed Bill 124, and it capped public sector wages at 1% for three years. At the time, everybody said—and I sat in the committee there. We were all saying, “This is a violation of charter rights.”

The Liberals passed a similar bill in 2011 capping public sector wages, and it went all the way to the Supreme Court. It was Bill 115. It went all the way to the Supreme Court, and the Supreme Court said, “This bill actually violates the charter right to freedom of association.” The charter right to freedom of association includes the right to be a member of a union and to fair collective bargaining. So people in this country have the right to be a member of a union and to have fair collective bargaining, and the government cannot override that right with a bill like the Liberal Bill 115 or the Conservative Bill 124. The Liberals had already spent—and I think this lasted about five years in the courts, fighting Bill 115—

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Point of order: I recognize the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you, Speaker. They’re very good remarks—but I don’t know the relevance to the bill, which doesn’t have anything to do with salaries.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I’ll caution the member to come back to the essence of the bill, please.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. I appreciate that.

This bill is all about balancing safety and speed, about getting it done. I’ve heard the member from Cambridge talk about getting things built faster, and this is about a process that we need to follow in here. Getting it done is one thing, but getting it done right is even more important.

Bill 124, when it was finally overturned by the Ontario Court of Appeal a few weeks ago—it found, the same as Bill 115, that it was a violation of the charter rights of the workers. If the government had just listened to the public sector workers and to the opposition, they could have saved us all five years and hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees.

Other reversals where the government is not finding the right balance: Bill 153 is about finding that right balance between speed and safety—but other places where the government has not found that right balance? Bill 23, the greenbelt bill; another bill that has been repealed. Bill 112, the dissolution of Peel region—when they looked at what would happen if you dissolved Peel region, the taxes in Brampton and in Mississauga would have to skyrocket in order to cover the cost of that dissolution, so that one is being repealed. The urban boundary expansions, Bill 150—that’s also being repealed. Bill 307, the use of the “notwithstanding” clause to override portions of the charter—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I’ll caution the member. It’s stretching a little bit, so we’ll just remember that the bill is Bill 153.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I hear you. I’ve only got one more here, and then I’ll get back to this other matter here.

Blue licence plates: I understand that the Conservative Party is blue and they’re very proud of that colour, but those blue licence plates were not visible and certainly one of the things that we need—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: They’re still there.

Mr. Chris Glover: My colleague from Oshawa is saying that those blue licence plates are still out there, even though they're not actually visible, and so they don't actually fit the work that a licence plate is supposed to do.

My colleague from Oshawa gave the one-hour lead earlier this afternoon on this bill, and she was talking about how two out of three people who are digging do not get the locate first—so they do not make the one call and call or click to get the locations of the utilities. To the people who are listening at home: This is not an option. You have to do that. If you're going to be digging on your property or anyone else's property, you have to make that call to find out where the utilities are. It's the law. If you do not make the call, you can be fined, and you are also liable for the damages that you cause. The frat house in London was a pretty clear example where those damages could be very, very extensive. My colleague from Oshawa also mentioned that 90% of the damages resulting from utility breaks are caused by people who didn't call.

Just a little bit of history that I also learned this afternoon: The One Call system came from a private member's bill called the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, and it was introduced in 2012 by a former NDP MPP from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. It was done in collaboration with the Conservative member from Sarnia–Lambton, who is still in the Legislature today. So there are ways for us to work across the aisle here, and that's nice to see, especially for something as important as this—because this One Call saves money, it saves time, and it can actually save lives if people actually make these calls.

The other thing about these calls is that they're free. I see in this legislation that those are going to remain free, which is really important, because costs should not be prohibitive. In the committee, there was talk that some of the utility companies may actually start charging for those calls—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: One utility.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay, for one utility company. I stand corrected by my colleague from Oshawa.

One utility company was suggesting that they actually charge for those locates, but that has been overruled, because you don't want the cost of the locate to be a barrier. You want people to call if they're going to be digging on their property or anybody else's property.

If you go to Ontario One Call, there is information for everybody who could be impacted by that, who needs to follow the rules around One Call. For homeowners: "If you are planting a tree, building a fence or a deck, digging a new garden, or doing any project that requires you to dig, you must contact Ontario One Call at least five business days before. It's free, it's easy, it's the law." So for homeowners out there, that's the advice that comes from the One Call website.

1730

For contractors: "If you are excavating a new building, repairing buried infrastructure, landscaping, residential paving, building concrete slabs, or anything that requires you to break ground, you must contact Ontario One Call.

It's free, it's easy, it's the law." That seems to be their tag line: "It's free, it's easy, it's the law."

And then, for infrastructure owners, it says, "Prevent damages and stay compliant." These are the utility companies, basically. They're saying, "Buried infrastructure owners are able to access educational resources and industry links to help with compliance and safe digging practices in Ontario." So they're looking for the utility companies to be a partner in this work.

One of the things that came up, though, and that I've heard from some of my colleagues from different parts of the province, is that it can take a long time. They're supposed to respond within five days; that's being extended, with this legislation, to 10 days. It can take a long time to get those locates done, and if it takes too long, people get frustrated.

One of my colleagues from a rural community said that it can take months in order to get a locate done. You may plan to do a project in the spring, and by the time you get the locate and are able to start work, it could be the fall, so people are actually just proceeding with this work because the locates are taking too long. This is something the government really needs to work on, to address—and it's largely caused by a worker shortage of people with the experience and with the skill set to go out and conduct these locates. The government really needs to address that, and that's one of the recommendations that came from my colleague from Oshawa.

She also talked about getting it done, and she talked about broadband across the province. Broadband, obviously, is a utility and is something that often involves digging. When I was sitting in committee and the government was talking about its broadband infrastructure project—and they're investing, as they've said, \$4 billion on this—they were talking about broadband that's 50/10, which means 50 megabytes a second download and 10 megabytes a second upload. I'm the tech and innovation critic for the official opposition NDP. I have talked to many, many tech people in the sector. They say that's already obsolete. We should not, in this province, be rolling out 50/10 broadband; we should be rolling out one gigabyte symmetrical.

One of my friends in my riding is actually from Haliburton. He's a VFX animator, and the only reason he lives in Toronto is because of the broadband. He has one-gigabyte symmetrical, and it costs him, I don't know, \$100. It's very reasonable here. No matter how much he pays, he cannot get one gigabyte symmetrical in Haliburton. The company that he works for is actually in Montreal, so he has no reason to have to work in Toronto except for the broadband—also, Toronto is a wonderful area, and he's in Spadina–Fort York, which is the greatest riding in the province of Ontario. So he has those perks.

The one gigabyte symmetrical is really vital in order to harness and tap into the economic potential of our rural and remote communities and Indigenous communities across this province.

I mentioned this when we were in committee, and I'll mention it again in this House: If you're a government

member, if you're talking in caucus, could you please recommend changing these contracts to make sure that everything that is rolled out is one gigabyte symmetrical?

It's not just animators—it's farmers who also need one gigabyte symmetrical, because they're doing geo-locations on their farm as they're working. The new tractors are actually measuring moisture—my colleague from Timiskaming can talk about this with much greater skill and knowledge than I can. They're doing locations and they're doing soil sampling in different parts of the field so that they know where to put more fertilizer and what kind of fertilizer that needs to go down. Anyway, that requires the one gigabyte symmetrical broadband. So for farmers, for industry in the northern, remote and Indigenous communities, we really need to get that one gigabyte symmetrical.

The government announced \$4 billion for expanding, rolling out broadband, and what my colleague from Oshawa was pointing out is that in 2021, it only spent 1.3% of the targeted spending for the investment in broadband; in 2021-22, it only spent 3.6%. In February 2023, it underspent the planned allotment by \$700 million, and the most recent underspending is \$450 million. This is not just spending—the spending is just a measure of “Is the broadband getting rolled out, and is it getting rolled out on schedule?” What the financial figures indicate is that it's not getting rolled out. I know many of our colleagues here in the House are from rural communities. Many of them have been living without broadband for a long time. So getting that rolled out is absolutely vital.

I'll just pass on one story. I don't have much time left. My colleague from Timiskaming said his community just wants to make sure they have phone service everywhere—because in some of the communities, the phones don't work when it rains. There was a house that burned down. The house caught fire, and the owners of the house tried to phone the fire department, and the phones weren't working. My colleague from Timiskaming was in a general store in a town near where the fire had taken place, and he was telling this story to one of the local residents. He said, “They picked up the phone, and the phone wouldn't work.” She said, “Well, of course, everybody knows the phones don't work when it rains.” The weird part about that is, that's the expectation in that community—that the phones aren't going to work when it rains.

Imagine when they get one gigabyte symmetrical broadband, and that's what the government needs to be rolling out. It needs to be doing it in a way that's safe and fast.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the member from Spadina–Fort York for his remarks.

Under this proposed legislation, we are really striving to streamline and improve underground infrastructure. My question is whether the member objects to changes like providing longer delivery timelines for larger construction projects that would need more dedicated time and effort to

properly and safely assess the underground infrastructure. Speaker, through you—in addition, depending on the member's response: I would then ask the member to basically explain why they think something so complex and technical should not be carefully examined to ensure the fastest and safest method possible.

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member from Newmarket–Aurora for her question.

Absolutely, safety is first. Safety has to be first, and speed has to be second, but we can balance those out. We can make sure we're doing something safely, and this is why this government—and I was talking about this in my speech—really needs to look at this “get it done” attitude that it has. Getting it done is great, but if you have to reverse everything and backtrack on major pieces of legislation that you've passed over the last five years, then you're not actually getting anything done; you're just wasting time. Get it done, but get it done right and get it done safely.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Spadina–Fort York for his presentation today and for recognizing what happened to 294 Central Avenue in my riding of London North Centre and the seriousness of it.

I also think of what happened during the construction that is currently under way—it happened in 2022—of a railway underpass on Adelaide Street, actually, at Central Avenue as well, when construction crews accidentally hit a natural gas line that affected 1,800 businesses and consumers, who had to be evacuated from their homes. Thankfully, there were no injuries, but it was because of the collaboration of a number of different city services to make sure the people were safe.

Currently in Bill 153, it has removed the ability of the owners of underground infrastructure to charge for certain locate requests, but they're also not going to be required to pay if they miss deadlines. Does the member have any sense from the government or from the legislation how these will be fulfilled in a timely way?

1740

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member from London North Centre for the question. I didn't realize the house was in your area. I had said London West, but the NDP caucus was in London last summer and I will say it's a really, really beautiful city. You guys have incredible, incredible architecture and a really happening place. We went to some restaurants in the downtown core. I'm really impressed with the way the downtown core has been revamped and animated.

Let's see. As far as your question goes, I don't see anything in the legislation about that. Certainly we need to be very cognizant of this.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I know approximately 44% of Ontario One Call's 847 members are municipal partners. It means a significant number of the locate requests are

there to ensure the safety and security of the communities that are being served.

My question to the member from Spadina–Fort York is this: Is the construction of more homes to bring down the cost of housing and unlock access to the Canadian dream for millions of newcomers in the coming years a value which this bill would provide, or is it better to retain the existing processes, red tape and bureaucratic fees that Ontario One Call is trying to alleviate but that always seems to be brought back into part of the conversation?

Mr. Chris Glover: We have a housing crisis in this province. I want to thank the member from—

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Chris Glover: —Windsor–Tecumseh for that question.

We've got a housing crisis. We've got a supply shortage, but we've got an affordability crisis. The two are somewhat interlinked, but for many people in this province, market housing will never be affordable for them.

The other thing that's happening right now is market housing is not being built because of the high interest rates, because people, the developers, cannot build under the current financial situation. We've got a 40-storey tower—well, an 80-storey tower that's half-built—at the corner of Yonge and Bloor. It's \$1.3 billion over budget and it's bankrupt, so we've got this tower sitting there that can't be completed.

Housing is not getting built by the for-profit market right now. The government needs to look at non-market housing in order to—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you. Further questions?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Spadina–Fort York for his debate. One of the things he talked about extensively was the failure to actually get things done. I had heard it described in the past as “ready, fire, aim.” Today, there was a cartoon by Theo Moudakis from the Toronto Star, who called it, “Get it done then walk it back,” which just is stuck in my head.

Now, in terms of this bill, Building Infrastructure Safely Act, is there anything in this bill that you're concerned about that we'll be coming back to debate again to fix the errors in this bill? Or are there any bills coming forward that you're afraid we're going to be having to patch up because of the “ready, fire, aim” approach of this government?

Mr. Chris Glover: “Ready, fire, aim”—I want to thank the member from Sudbury for the question.

That “ready, fire, aim” strategy—this government has been using it over and over again over the last five years, and it just wastes a lot of time and it wastes a lot of money. It's not a strategy that should be implemented.

This is the third revision to this act in the last year. So the question is, had they done the proper consultation the first time they were looking at this act, would there have been need for three different acts? Or could this have been done all at once and sped up the process of getting this legislation through, and at the same time, making the

building of homes more efficient? That's a question for the government.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Bill 142, which was supported by the member opposite and his party, was much more in depth, but it did receive their support—the Better for Consumers, Better for Businesses Act, having received royal assent at the end of last year.

This is much shorter. This is building upon already what was a consensus bill from the minority Parliament of 2011 to 2014, a great example of how minority Parliaments can work, where the NDP and PC members brought forth the original Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act of 2012. Now we've expanded that with just 16 sections, expanding the dedicated locator model; no personal liability for employees, officers or directors of the corporation; banning locate fees, explicitly.

Would the member agree that this is a major improvement on what was already a great consensus bill?

Mr. Chris Glover: You know what, I'll give that one. There are improvements in this bill. We've talked about it on this side of the House this afternoon. There are definitely improvements to the process. I'm just wondering if they could have all been rolled into one bill rather than doing three separate bills over the course of 12 months.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: It is good to hear debate today and that things are pretty collegial, and it's nice to hear the member from Spadina–Fort York actually agree with something that the government has put forward. I hope that he's going to support this bill. And maybe I'll give him an opportunity to talk a little bit more about the things he does like in this bill and that he can support and it sounds like the NDP caucus will support.

I'd also remind him that there are PC members on that side of the House as well; it's not just the NDP caucus. We won a second majority government that is so large it actually wraps around the other side of the Legislature.

So we're talking about those things too, and I'd love to give him another 30 seconds to talk a little more.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): A very quick response.

Mr. Chris Glover: Okay. I don't have much time in response. I will acknowledge the Conservative rump on this side of the House. I think it's appropriately named.

There's 15 seconds left. There are some good things in this bill, and I'll acknowledge that.

Interjections.

Mr. Chris Glover: Oh, it is late in the day. I'm sitting down. You guys have a great one.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Sherif Sabawy: It is my pleasure to rise in the House today to reiterate my support for Bill 153, the Building Infrastructure Safely Act, 2023.

This bill is just one component of our government's ambitious legislative agenda to build the infrastructure Ontario needs today and to address the needs of tomorrow. It is also a testament to our government's dedication for fostering a safer, more efficient and cost-effective environment for developing infrastructure in Ontario. This includes key priority areas such as housing, health care, transit and Internet connectivity.

Madam Speaker, I would like to highlight how this bill fits in the context of our government's broader vision and commitment to ensuring a prosperous and sustainable future for Ontario. With Ontario growing at an incredible speed, this bill would also play a vital role in maintaining public safety and safeguarding the critical underground infrastructure systems that support our communities and our economy.

Under the leadership of Premier Doug Ford, Ontario has embarked on one of the most significant capital investment plans in the province's history. This significant commitment aims to revitalize schools, hospitals, public transit, roads, housing and to provide a universal access to high-speed Internet for every community across the province by the end of 2025. That's why this bill focuses on eliminating locate fees, streamlining processes and protecting both workers and critical infrastructure. That positions Ontario as a leader in responsible and forward-looking governance.

We know that by building and maintaining more infrastructure, we are growing communities. And we know it will take a concerted effort, led by the government and accomplished by strong partnerships. It is thanks to strong stakeholder support from a wide range of stakeholders that we have gotten this far.

1750

As we plan for Ontario's future, we will make use of every tool available to make sure the infrastructure projects we all need are built, whether small or large. We will ensure that all infrastructure is built and maintained to the highest standard of safety standards, because we owe it to our communities, to businesses and to individuals to ensure they feel the benefits from these projects. This includes our construction workers, our trade workers and our skilled workers—all the hard-working people who help build this province by creating and maintaining our infrastructure. It is all part of building Ontario faster and strengthening our communities and laying the foundation for long-term economic growth.

Madam Speaker, the most important of the proposed legislative amendments to the One Call act is the prohibition on underground infrastructure owners or operators from charging fees for locates. Our goal is to keep costs down for a wide range of construction projects while protecting the public from damages to critical infrastructure. Not only would this be consistent with a long-standing industry practice across Canada and the United States, this would also align with our broader plan to facilitate the efficient and safe completion of vital infrastructure projects.

Bill 153 proposes amendments to the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, which is

administered by One Call, an administrative authority overseen by the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery.

Within our ministry are 12 administrative authorities that have certain delegated responsibilities in specific sectors and industries, and they administer and enforce certain Ontario laws regarding consumer protection and public safety. For example, if you live in a condominium unit, you have benefited from the work of administrative authorities such as the Condominium Management Regulatory Authority of Ontario. If you have ever hired a licensed electrical contractor, that contractor has been licensed by the Electrical Safety Authority, which enforces the Ontario Electrical Safety Code. The Travel Industry Council of Ontario regulates all Ontario registered travel retailers. It also administers a fund that can reimburse consumers if their registered travel agent has major financial troubles. The Technical Standards and Safety Authority regulates technical safety, including elevating devices and amusement park rides.

All of Ontario's administrative authorities have one thing in common and that is their responsibility to protect consumers and the public interest. Because they are governed by different statutes that have been amended over the years, their frameworks have evolved in different ways. Through the Rebuilding Consumer Confidence Act, 2020, steps have been taken to address these differences and to improve and harmonize the accountability, oversight and transparency requirements of most administrative authorities. Over the past few years, ministers' orders have directed several administrative authorities to make changes to the governance and composition of their respective boards of directors. The overarching goal is to ensure the delivery of critical consumer protection programs and services, and public safety laws.

Our government has asked Ontario One Call to take on a more complex role. As such, it is important to provide them with the tools to help them work better with us. This includes more complex work to support the improvements of efficiencies in locate delivery, which requires better systems, backed up by better and sustainable resources.

Madam Speaker, this bill also advances important changes made under the Getting Ontario Connected Act, 2022, in improving the locate delivery system and making the process of obtaining locates more efficient, all while maintaining Ontario's strict safety standards. Among these changes made to the Ontario One Call act, it included requiring designated broadband projects to use a dedicated locator. A dedicated locator is agreed to by the project owner and the affected members, and it is responsible for responding to locate requests for the duration of the project. This model helps drive efficiencies and avoid duplication by allowing a project owner to get all their locates completed by one locator, rather than waiting on different locators from each underground infrastructure owner or operator.

These proposed changes to the One Call act similarly work to streamline processes, providing One Call with the explicit authority to charge and collect fees. It would allow

One Call to make bylaw changes to implement ministers' orders without requiring member approval and allow the minister to specify additional objects for One Call. This ministerial power would, if passed, give the minister the ability and flexibility to expand One Call's role in the future and address unexpected issues.

Some other proposed changes to the One Call act include protections for the authority's statutory officials, officers, directors, employees and agents from personal liability. These are reasonable protections currently provided to other administrative authorities, and this amendment, along with other measures, would bring One Call more in line with other administrative authorities.

Madam Speaker, these are necessary changes if One Call is to evolve as a public safety administrative authority. These changes are in response to the feedback we received in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, such as underground infrastructure owners and operators, excavators, municipalities and others, on how to improve

and ensure locate delivery and ensure the sustainable operation of One Call, while limiting cost impacts.

Before I wrap up, this bill, if passed, is a key part of our government's plan to build Ontario. I hope that all my colleagues in this House will join us in supporting legislation that will ensure our province has the capacity to grow at the pace we need it to. Our government is proud of what we have accomplished, but more work must be done. And I can assure you that we will continue to work with our public and private sector partners to ensure that the critical infrastructure Ontario needs is built.

I appreciate all those who supported our bill for the benefit of our fellow citizens and residents. I'm looking forward to hearing from my colleagues in this House on how we can build—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to the member from Mississauga—Erin Mills.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

Report continues in volume B.

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Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flack, Hon. / L'hon. Rob (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associé du Logement
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
		Premier / Premier ministre
		Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Michael D. (PC)	York South—Weston / York-Sud—Weston	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiques et du Multiculturalisme
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hazell, Andrea (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Holland, Kevin (PC)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Jama, Sarah (IND)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
		Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre
Jones, Trevor (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Jordan, John (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Ke, Vincent (IND)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon. Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	
Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean	
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Mantha, Michael (IND)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC)	Durham	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises
McCrimmon, Karen (LIB)	Kanata—Carleton	
McGregor, Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
		Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines
Quinn, Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Kaleed (IND)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Northern Development / Ministre du Développement du Nord Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée déléguée aux Petites Entreprises
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	Associate Minister of Transportation / Ministre associé des Transports
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Vaugois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
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
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Vacant	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Vacant	Milton	