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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 4 March 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 4 mars 2024

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ENHANCING ACCESS TO JUSTICE ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À AMÉLIORER L'ACCÈS À LA JUSTICE

Mr. Downey moved third reading of the following bill: Bill 157, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to the courts and other justice matters / Projet de loi 157, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les tribunaux et d'autres questions relatives à la justice.

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

Hon. Doug Downey: Yes, I would, Mr. Speaker.

Good morning. I'm pleased to rise in the House today to continue debate on the Enhancing Access to Justice Act, 2023. As I begin, I'll say that I'm splitting my time with my colleague the Solicitor General.

Now, if passed, Bill 157, the Enhancing Access to Justice Act, would improve access to justice, enhance community safety and modernize the justice system for Ontarians.

The Enhancing Access to Justice Act represents a necessary step forward for Ontario's justice system. Our government is bringing forward important changes that would allow us to take bold and immediate action to strengthen and modernize the justice system by simplifying court and government operations and increasing community safety. We are also proposing comprehensive legislative updates that address the evolving challenges faced by victims, children and families across our great province.

Before I go any further, though, I want to thank my colleague Minister Kerzner and his team for their great partnership and efforts in supporting this important piece of legislation. I appreciate the opportunity to work alongside my colleague and his incredible team that he leads at the Solicitor General's office.

I also want to thank the stakeholders who provided input and have been the driving force behind so many of the proposals I'll share with you today: the Ontario Bar Association, the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association, the

Law Society of Ontario, our colleagues at the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery along with the judiciary and others who have given input into these matters.

I'd also like to mention the numerous stakeholders who provided written submissions and testimony during the public hearings stage. We had a lot of interest, and the standing committee was hard at work going through all of them and having those discussions. I want to thank all members of that committee from all parties. I think it was a very constructive discussion and there were some good amendments that came out of it.

There are so many people who have provided input into this bill and many of them also participated in the consultations during the last few years as we continue to improve Ontario's justice system. I'd like to acknowledge the First Nations communities that engaged in one-on-one discussions to provide their perspectives on approaches to cannabis regulation and how to support cannabis regulation on-reserve.

I also want to thank the outstanding professionals working at the Ministry of the Attorney General. There are some 8,000-plus employees of the Ministry of the Attorney General across the province. I have to say, their professionalism, drive and collaboration to keep our system going and evolving is unparalleled, from every corner of this province.

I've had many different roles in our justice sector myself, including working as a clerk and a court registrar before I went to law school. I know that when positive change happens, it's truly the result of the determined and collaborative efforts made throughout the system. I am fortunate to play a role in continuing to make positive change, including through the proposals in this important legislation.

Our government is taking active steps to ensure that Ontario's justice system and laws meet the demands of the 21st century. We've hit some major milestones over the past year, but there is always more work to be done. Despite our advances, some of Ontario's court processes are still pretty inflexible, which can lead to inefficiencies and challenges for court users.

That's why we are putting forward proposals today to change the Courts of Justice Act and other statutes to create flexibility and fix current gaps in procedures. These changes will streamline processes, create efficiencies and free up court time and resources. I'm talking about common-sense changes like limiting the delays that could happen during a child protection trial when a provincial court judge is appointed to another court.

Here's how it happens: If an Ontario Court of Justice judge is appointed as a Superior Court judge or a Court of Appeal judge, and they are in the middle of a child protection trial at the time, it has to start all over again with another judge. This kind of disruption could have negative impacts on the child and their family. That's why we're making a change to limit this type of disruption and allow that provincial court judge to finish the trial, even if they're appointed to another court.

We're also putting forward changes to make certain procedures for judges in the Court of Appeal and Superior Court of Justice more flexible when they deal with common challenges, some of which can cause significant delays and use court resources. One of these challenges is dealing with vexatious litigants.

Now, I want to clarify that a vexatious litigant is someone who repeatedly brings forward legal proceedings that have no chance of succeeding in court. These actions can potentially have an abusive purpose, like harassing or wearing down opposing parties. This depletes the court's time and resources, which are better used for legitimate attempts to resolve disputes. It also costs the other parties money and time to respond to each case and show up in court.

Currently, an order against a vexatious litigant can only be obtained in the Superior Court of Justice. Our proposal would allow not only Superior Court judges but also judges at the Court of Appeal, the highest level of court in our province, to make orders declaring someone to be a vexatious litigant and stop them from starting any cases in the future without obtaining permission. At the same time, vexatious litigants' procedural rights will still be preserved, like the right to know that the court is thinking of making an order against them.

Overall, this is a positive change, one that will help reduce the use of court resources and the delays that vexatious litigants can cause. This bill really is about fixing the process. Situations involving vexatious litigants eat up a lot of time. We must make sure that we are building capacity in the system for the employees who we have hired to help bring cases forward.

We have made considerable investments to help resolve long-standing problems. We've done a lot of work, but there is more to do. In the same way that we're improving and modernizing processes in the courts, we also need to address court-related legislation that is now outdated, particularly if this results in those laws being unclear or out of step with current technology or practices.

In the past, we've made a number of changes to bring forward change that aligns with technology. In fact, it wasn't that long ago that we changed the rules of civil procedure to allow service by email instead of by telegraph, which sounds laughable, but that was in fact the case. That was written right in the rules.

We're proposing changes that would make legislation clear and current, addressing outdated language in an act or clarifying details that can cause delays and frustration. These are just a few examples of obvious fixes to some

long-standing problems. We don't want to wait any longer to implement them.

Together with the judiciary and partners across the justice system, we continue to harness new and existing technologies to improve and expand access to many different services. I want to take a minute to tell you what we've already done and where we're headed next.

Over the past few years, we've been hard at work breaking down long-standing barriers in the system and moving more services online and closer to Ontarians, no matter where they live. This includes rural, northern and First Nations communities. We've expanded electronic filing to nearly 800 types of civil, family, bankruptcy, Divisional Court and Small Claims Court documents through Justice Services Online. We've expanded our online court case search tool to ensure the public can search basic court information and select civil and active criminal matters without having to line up or call a courthouse.

0910

Speaker, the way this worked before is an individual would have to go to the courthouse, find the kiosk, search through the kiosk to see if there was an outstanding matter or something on the docket that day. This isn't just about litigation, it's also about commercial and business services, because if you're closing a large corporate deal, you would want to know that there is no active litigation happening at the last minute that wasn't disclosed. So you would send either a clerk or a student or a young lawyer to the courthouse to go check that kiosk.

When COVID came, we couldn't check kiosks because you couldn't get in the courthouse because we had to close for safety reasons. The department pivoted very quickly to take that data—I won't get into the technology of it—very quickly API it into a form that they could put out on the Internet, which is something that I was surprised we weren't doing already anyway.

The great by-product of doing that was not only to help the practising lawyers and their clients have current information and close deals, but the media was able to check court dockets without having to go down to the courthouse. That wasn't something that was even on my radar was happening, but it was a great by-product of the technology advancements and doing things the way we expect them to happen in the modern day—increased transparency for the court system, which is something that we all value.

Speaker, we've also started implementing landmark projects that will lead to transformative change across the system. I've spoken about our Courts Digital Transformation Initiative a number of times in this House. I'm happy to say the project is now under way and will replace outdated paper-based procedures with a single digital platform to support access to the Superior Court of Justice and the Ontario Court of Justice. This is going to change how we do business right across the board.

We currently have different systems running in different courts for different topic areas. If you have a family law matter in the Superior Court as opposed to a family

law matter in the Ontario Court, you would be running on a different technological backbone. You wouldn't have a commonality in the criminal law system, whether it was the Superior Court or Ontario Court. We were running legacy systems that were coming to the end of their life cycle.

For the first time in Ontario history, we've managed to have collaboration of all the partners—Superior Court, Ontario Court and the Ministry of the Attorney General—to come together to create one backbone for the system. I can tell you this is being watched around the world. It's going to be a significant change in how we do business and how paper flows. It's going to update the paper-based procedures with a single digital platform.

The platform will be better for people who encounter the system. This isn't just about lawyers and judges, this is about the everyday citizen who's going to come in contact with the justice system, because their lawyers also—if they have a lawyer—won't need to know two or three different systems. This will help us on the back end when it comes to IT professionals and having resources available to solve problems quickly, because they'll need to know one system and not five.

We're going to have a system that helps them resolve legal matters faster and easier, which by definition means cheaper. It's going to deliver better service in terms of judges being able to issue orders electronically, information flowing in real time, trials happening and the documents being there. I know that doesn't sound like a big deal, having the documents be there, but I can tell you as somebody who was a court clerk and a registrar, a lot of time was spent chasing down paper—paper that may be in the file, may be in the bin to be put in the file, in some cases fell underneath the cabinet when the fax machine rolled off. There was paper all over the place, and there are stories of delays and unintended consequences with that. This will solve those problems, because the paper will flow electronically, and it will be there when it needs to be there—

Mr. Anthony Leardi: So many dead trees avoided.

Hon. Doug Downey: I heard my colleague say, “So many dead trees avoided.” Speaker, I can tell you, I actually have an email—I kept it—from a printer who said that the things that I am doing are seriously affecting his business. I take that as a win. I think that's a great thing.

When we talk about transformational change, this kind of thing is exactly what we're talking about: significant investments to move us into a new era of justice in Ontario.

A responsive and agile system is also one that keeps people safe, especially the most vulnerable people in our communities. Increasing access to justice for victims of crime is a vital priority for this government. Ontario's justice system needs to be accessible and responsive to all Ontarians, especially those who need it the most. That is why we are proposing changes to the Victims' Bill of Rights that would make it easier and less traumatizing for certain victims to sue convicted offenders for emotional distress and related bodily harm.

Currently, until this bill passes, there are three types of crimes identified in the Victims' Bill of Rights where a

victim can sue their convicted offender for emotional distress that is already presumed to be true. These crimes include assault by a spouse, sexual assault and attempted sexual assault. What it means when we say that they are presumed to be true is, when somebody is the victim of an individual who is convicted, that victim can sue civilly for the emotional and physical damages, and only in those three instances do they not have to prove that they were victimized, don't have to go through it all again, don't have to explain that in fact this heinous act victimized them.

There are more areas that I believe—that are in this bill—that it should be expanded to:

- victims of human trafficking, who should not have to go into court and relive the fact that it affected them emotionally and physically—I think we can take it as true, when the individual who perpetuated the crime is convicted, that the victim went through emotional and physical trauma;

- victims where the crime is of a sexual nature or involves a sexual purpose, which is an expansion on the previous three that exist;

- victims of sexual offences who were minors or persons with disabilities at the time of the crime; and

- victims of the distribution of a voyeuristic recording or an intimate image without that person's consent.

There is well-documented evidence that victims of these crimes experience long-term effects like post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and other mental health conditions.

At FPTs—federal-provincial-territorial meetings—we've had discussions about what is happening, of course, on the Internet and the distribution of images without people's consent, and I can tell you, Speaker, this is really horrific stuff. It really affects individuals who, quite frankly, can't chase the Internet fast enough. You can't get it shut down. It's very difficult once it's out on the Internet. I think that is obvious to most of us. There are tools, but it's not sufficient. If you are the victim of somebody doing that, I don't think you should have to go into court and prove that it, in fact, affected you. I think we can presume that it affected you.

These amendments will complement the recent changes made to the regulation under the Victims' Bill of Rights, where additional crimes such as terrorism offences, motor vehicle theft and hate crimes that target religious officials and places of worship were all added to the list of crimes where victims can sue their convicted offenders for emotional distress and related bodily harm. Through the work we are proposing, it is clear that we are listening to victims and making the necessary changes to improve their experiences in and with the justice system.

The regulation we amended under the Victims' Bill of Rights makes it easier for victims of motor vehicle theft to sue convicted offenders for emotional distress and related bodily harm. I'd like to talk about auto theft more broadly for a moment and what the government is doing to address this alarming issue. I think my colleague the Solicitor General may touch on this as well.

As you know, in recent months Ontario has seen significant increases in violent auto thefts. That's why

we've made significant investments in new measures over the last year to help the police identify and dismantle organized crime networks and put offenders behind bars. My colleague the Solicitor General knows all about the work we are doing. In fact, he is leading most of it, under the leadership of Premier Ford, to keep communities safe and combat the rise in auto theft. This funding supports first-of-its-kind auto theft prosecution teams that will investigate and prosecute criminal organizations that profit and benefit from stealing vehicles.

As part of these new measures, my ministry is creating a new major auto theft prosecution response team to provide dedicated support to the Ontario Provincial Police. Our \$14-million investment over three years in this new auto theft prosecution team will help prevent violent vehicle theft and help identify, disrupt and dismantle organized criminal networks that are involved.

0920

Auto theft and gun crime are urgent and interconnected issues in Ontario. It is vital to take a cross-governmental approach to help keep communities safe. Last month, our federal partners agreed to contribute \$121 million to the Gun and Gang Violence Action Fund. This federal funding, in combination with our provincial investments, will support initiatives that not only deliver strong enforcement and prosecution but also address key risk factors associated with crime, violence and victimization. The work is just getting started.

Speaking of safer communities, our government remains committed to protecting children and youth from the negative effects of cannabis. Five years ago, the federal government legalized cannabis in Canada. Part of this new legislation allowed for the growth of up to four cannabis plants in people's homes. That means currently, recreational cannabis can be legally grown in homes with child care facilities. I don't think anybody meant that to happen; I don't think anybody thought that would happen.

As another means of keeping our children and youth safe, we are proposing to ban the growth of recreational cannabis in both licensed and unlicensed homes offering child care services. British Columbia has had a similar rule in place for years. We feel it's a safe and measured way to limit youth exposure and access to cannabis.

We're also taking steps to negotiate and implement agreements with First Nations communities to support cannabis regulations on reserves. Entering into agreements with First Nations communities reinforces a shared commitment to keeping communities safe, protecting our youth, ensuring a safe supply of recreational cannabis and reducing unregulated cannabis sales.

Currently, there are only seven licensed recreational cannabis retailers on First Nations reserves in Ontario. This means that all other retailers on reserves are operating outside the provincially regulated framework. That's why our government is proposing legislative amendments that would strengthen our ability to enter into and implement agreements with communities on reserves. This comes on the heels of much conversation with First Nations partners and the aspirations we share for a safe and regulated market to protect youth in communities.

I just want to clarify that this initiative to allow proposed legislative amendments to strengthen our ability to enter into and implement agreements comes in collaboration with First Nations. This is not the government coming to First Nations saying, "Here's what we think you should do." This is First Nations coming to us saying, "We want to work with you. We want to be within the regulated framework. We want to keep our children safe. We want to keep our communities safe, so we want to work with you." We are adapting to that, and we hope to move beyond the seven licensed recreational cannabis retailers.

I'd like to touch on next—this is really important stuff, and it's very topical, of course. I want to briefly talk about another way our government is enhancing the justice system, strengthening our community and holding offenders accountable. It's something we've previously announced, and it's a crucial part of our commitment to keep our communities safe from crime while finding solutions to increase public safety. The Enhancing Access to Justice Act builds on our government's work to advocate for bail reform and supports our investments in law enforcement, auto theft prevention and court digitalization.

Back in the spring of last year, we announced a \$112-million investment over three years to ensure that high-risk and repeat offenders comply with their bail conditions. Now, Speaker, we talk about bail, and it wasn't that long ago—it certainly doesn't seem that long ago—that the Premier and the other Premiers got together. Our Premier, Premier Ford, wrote a letter to the federal government, and all the other Premiers and territorial leaders signed onto that letter. It was to the federal government, saying, "We want reverse onus and stricter bail for repeat and violent offenders."

At first, people said, "Stay in your lane. That's a federal issue." But it was so in need of attention that in fact, it was well received. The police associations across the province, across the country, said that yes, they're seeing the same thing: "Repeat and violent offenders are cycling through courts, and we want something to make a difference."

We asked for reverse onus. Fairly quickly, I got a call from my counterpart federally. He said, "Would you be willing to meet?" I said, "You name the place. You name the time. We will be there." The Solicitor General and I went to Ottawa. We had a conversation with the other provinces and territories and the federal government. It was subsequently put into law by the federal government, supported by all parties and is now the law for serious and repeat violent offenders. This is what can happen when Ontario speaks up and when Ontario talks to its colleagues. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, we often say in the House that if the opposition would phone their federal cousins on this issue or that issue, it would be helpful. And I don't know that people know how helpful it could be—because it really does make a difference when we reach to federal counterparts to move ideas forward, and so I think we'll continue that work and continue to ask for that kind of support.

But in terms of the investment that we made, we're investing \$26 million over three years to establish inten-

sive serious violent crime bail support teams so it will cover all of Ontario. And those are teams, working alongside police services and bail compliance units. The teams make sure all the necessary evidence is in place to make the best possible case when bail hearings are held for repeat offenders involved in serious crimes.

We want to make sure we have our best foot forward, we have all the evidence, that it's put together in a way that can be easily digested by the justice of the peace or the judge who is hearing the matter. We want to make sure that we have everything together and that there is no excuse for giving bail to somebody who otherwise would not receive it.

I want to update you today on these intensive serious violent crime bail support teams, launched September 25 of last year. They're all now hard at work. Their goal is to increase public safety by reducing the risk that persons accused of violent and serious crimes will reoffend.

We will continue advocating to the federal government for meaningful bail reform. We need to keep our community safe. There is more to do. We will continue to reach out across the aisle here for support federally so that we can move forward to keep our communities safe—not just our children but all of our communities.

Now, I'd be remiss if didn't talk about some of the northern and remote services that we have been able to move forward with since I was up last talking. We are now in a position where we have worked with First Nations to put in Starlink in 29 fly-in reserves where we would otherwise require people to leave the reserve to attend a court hearing, and we can now in a stable environment have those hearings online without taking somebody out of their community, which can be very disruptive. This is not a day trip; this is often flying into Sioux Lookout, travelling to a court location, having the hearing and having to make your way back. It's very expensive, it's not very convenient and, quite frankly, it's disruptive to the community when they have to leave.

Speaker, I'm hesitating a little bit, because when I first learned about how this works—it may actually be that when the individual is leaving the reserve to go to Kenora, for instance, they're on the same plane. The victim and the offender are on the same plane—a little six-seater plane—and along with perhaps a witness or two, all in this six-seater plane into Sioux Lookout, and then they have to travel to Kenora. The cost associated with all that—but the human dynamic with that is not what we would expect. So Starlink is a game-changer for us, our ability to do things in a remote way, and I'm very, very excited about it.

Now, Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation. If passed, the reforms in the Enhancing Access to Justice Act would further support access to justice for victims of crime, simplify court and government operations, and support communities. Today's proposed changes would make it easier for vulnerable victims of crime to sue an offender for emotional distress, as I mentioned. They would protect children and youth by banning the growth of recreational cannabis in homes that offer child care services and explore ways to put an end to

illegal online cannabis sales. They would limit interruptions to child protection trials that would happen when a provincial court judge is appointed to another court. They would help provide the tools and resources to keep Ontario communities safe and resilient. If passed, the Enhancing Access to Justice Act would ensure that Ontario's justice system remains fair, responsive and accessible to those in most need, while continuing to keep people safe.

0930

I look forward to continuing to bring forward areas of improvement in the justice system. As you know, Speaker, the job is not done. There are challenges in all systems, and it's with a keen eye that we're working with our colleagues—whether it be the Solicitor General, whether it be the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery, or whether it be any number of ministries—to identify issues, find out policy options, work with our partners in the justice system and beyond, and come to some sort of solution. We're in the solution business, Speaker, and we want to make sure that we're bringing everything forward that we possibly can to protect people, keep communities safe, protect our children and get the job done. I look forward to engaging further with Ontarians and our valued partners in the justice sector on this important legislation.

I'll now turn things over to the Solicitor General, to discuss his ministry's very important items in the Enhancing Access to Justice Act. Thank you. Merci. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I recognize the Solicitor General.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: It's my pleasure to rise in the House today and to participate in third reading of the Enhancing Access to Justice Act. I want to thank my colleague and friend for speaking now and leading us in the debate on third reading. My colleague is a person who's absolutely relentless when it comes to helping keep Ontario safe, and I want to thank him sincerely for his leadership each and every day. It has always been a pleasure when we attend conferences in Ottawa, or wherever we go, to stand up for what the values of Ontarians are: to live safely in our communities each and every day. I want to thank him.

Madam Speaker, I also want to acknowledge, as we witness the flags flying at half-staff outside of our Legislative Building, the passing of the 18th Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney. I was in university when Prime Minister Mulroney was our Prime Minister, and I felt, as a student, I had a front-row seat to so many of the challenges, but also opportunities, that he exposed for Canada, and how he reassumed the leadership of Canada's place around the world. His absence and void to us as Canadians is immeasurable, and I especially want to send my personal condolences to my colleague and friend the President of the Treasury Board, and to the extended Mulroney family.

Public safety and justice will always be important as one of our government's highest priorities. As part of the oath of office that I took as minister, I am dedicated now more than ever to creating a safer Ontario for everyone. We see it for ourselves, Madam Speaker, as we travel the

province. Wherever we go, each member in this incredible Legislature who represents a riding somewhere in Ontario, it's absolutely undeniable that when we go home to our ridings and constituencies and meet with our neighbours and shopkeepers and friends, public safety is always on their minds each and every day.

For this government—and I've said this before—we are concerned about public safety morning, noon and night. Updating this legislation is critical, and our government is acting. Never has there been a government more dedicated to breaking down the barriers and identifying the opportunities that we need to seize upon to keep Ontario safe.

I've said this before: Never have we had a Premier who was more committed to keeping our province safe, and it is an honour every day to work and to help build the safest province we can under the leadership of Premier Ford. Our Premier has proven himself with a commitment—an absolute commitment to our public safety. And I've said this, as well: His commitment and our government's commitment to public safety is absolute and constant. The proposed Enhancing Access to Justice Act supports this critical work with amendments to existing public safety legislation.

Public safety plays a crucial role in preventing crime and violence and unacceptable behaviour. I want to touch for a moment on what my colleague the Attorney General said as an example when it comes to fighting auto theft. Why is this so important? Why now are we subjected to such a tremendous, tremendous rise in auto thefts, where people are experiencing seeing their doors kicked in early in the morning and thieves and violent offenders just saying, "Give me your car keys"? It's completely unacceptable.

Very recently, the Attorney General and I went to attend the auto theft summit, and we advocated strongly to our federal counterpart exactly what needs to be done because Ontario's police services—the OPP, the municipal police services and First Nations police services—have exposed the criminality that needs to be contained. I said then, when I was at the conference, that there's a lot that could be done.

And I said then—madame la Présidente, comme je l'ai dit récemment lors de la conférence à Ottawa sur le vol de voitures, je prends la sécurité du public très au sérieux. Nous sommes préoccupés par l'augmentation récente de vol de voitures. Je suis préoccupé par l'augmentation de la criminalité. Mais en même temps, notre gouvernement propose des solutions et des stratégies pour assurer la sécurité de l'Ontario.

And we said it when we were there. We told them exactly what needs to be done and I look forward to working co-operatively with them because we're dedicated to law enforcement efforts that deter criminal activities, investigate allegations, apprehend offenders and prosecute individuals who violate laws and harm others. My oath aims to protect the lives and the well-being of individuals in everyone's community.

This includes safeguarding people from harm and injury and violence and accidents and emergencies, ensuring that

everyone can live free from fear and insecurity. This includes new regulatory tools that address trends in criminal activity. These tools empower our front line by giving them the means to accomplish tasks independently and confidently. With the right tools and supports, our government will provide even more opportunities to help keep Ontario safe. This aim is to identify and analyze and address the challenges effectively. This will furthermore enhance the ability to keep the people of Ontario safe.

Madam Speaker, when justice is properly aligned with public safety—and my colleague talked about it—the bond strengthens a civil society together. The proposed amendments in this bill will play a crucial role in ensuring that individuals who need this legislation are able to access them. By enshrining them in legal frameworks, they will strengthen protections and solidify them for all of Ontario. Together, we have built strong and accountable institutions that supports the pursuit of justice and reflects who we are and what we stand for. Because our government is breaking down barriers, this has become an evolutionary process.

I want to talk for just a minute about something that I think has been transformational, again led by Premier Ford. And I want to give a shout-out to my parliamentary assistants, the members from Etobicoke–Lakeshore and from Sarnia–Lambton, because they've seen it for themselves. They've joined me at the Ontario Police College and, Madam Speaker, just in a week's time—a little more than a week, on March 15—I will have the honour of attending my sixth march past since being sworn in as Solicitor General. And why is this important? Because the changes our government has made by breaking down the barriers to encourage more people to go to the Ontario Police College, to move the graduating class numbers from approximately 1,400 a year to—please, God—approximately 2,200 a year is transformational. It didn't just happen; it happened because Premier Ford and our government said, "We need more boots on the ground. We need people keeping our community safe. We have to break down the barriers." That's exactly what we did.

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On March 15, over 500 new cadets will take their place somewhere in Ontario to help keep Ontario safe. Our communities are growing, so we need more people on the ground to do just that. For me to preside over this moment in time, to see something happen where we can look people in the eye, and say, "We will put more boots on the ground. This is how we'll do it. This is how we will get more people graduating at the Ontario Police College" has been an honour and a privilege beyond a lifetime.

Another initiative we're talking about through the act: I want to talk about the CSPA, the Community Safety and Policing Act. This framework legislation that is modernizing the way policing is done in the province is, again, very transformational. It is with immense pride to deliver this act that will come into force on April 1, 2024, in just a few weeks. How unbelievable is this, that the CSPA is redefining community safety? It's replacing a piece of

legislation that was enacted when Bob Rae was Premier in 1990—that's almost 35 years ago. To see our province move forward in 2024 to get the job done, to stay true to its commitment that this is something that we would prioritize—and we've worked very collaboratively, my colleagues know this—with all the stakeholders: the police associations, the police service boards associations and many who have come together. I must say, Madam Speaker, they represent different interests. At times, historically, they may have been conflicting interests. But the way they work together and to make sure that this was a piece of legislation they could say, "We've landed it in a good place"—I want to thank them.

Last week, when I was together with the Premier at the CSPA summit, which will help walk the different stakeholders through how this piece of legislation will be so transformational, was a great honour. Through the act and its regulations, it will effectively respond to the evolving nature of crime and community safety expectations—and that's the key word, "expectations"—in every municipality. The CSPA will, most importantly, increase the trust between communities and their police services. It will ensure that police work closely with communities, including the most vulnerable.

By the way, Madam Speaker, I've said this at many times as part of the march past graduation ceremony at the police college—I've urged our cadets to be part of their community, to be part of fabric of the community, to celebrate our differences because Ontario looks like Ontario. *Parce que notre diversité est notre plus grande réussite.* One of our greatest strengths is our diversity, and I can tell everyone here that when you attend a march past, as many of us have done over our time in this Legislature—most recently, again, the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore and the member from Sarnia–Lambton bore witness themselves to something so miraculous.

We've created this legislation that will promote effective, independent and unbiased governance of policing personnel, and it will happen through an independent process for police disciplinary hearings and oversight. While these principles embedded in the CSPA will stand for generations, the framework itself will evolve with the province, and that's a very important feature. This is a living document. It will live and it will breathe—an epitome of fairness and safety.

Madam Speaker, the act amendments to the CSPA, the Community Safety and Policing Act, 2019, will further clarify the process set out for disciplinary hearings. We are ensuring the benefit and fairness to police officers will come with this legislation because we prioritize the well-being of Ontarians and their communities. The police play a crucial role in achieving this goal.

It's important for us to ensure police agencies uphold the rule of law by enforcing the laws impartially and consistently. Changes to the process for public engagement on regulatory proposals under the CSPA will align with process across government statutes. The proposed amendments are imperative before bringing the new

policing framework into force on April 1 this year. One of the cornerstones is to reform Ontario's police oversight framework.

As part of the act, the Ontario Police Arbitration Commission will be renamed the Ontario Police Arbitration and Adjudication Commission, or OPAAC. The chair of OPAAC will take on an expanded mandate, including appointing independent adjudicators to hearings. This will give police officers greater confidence through independent hearings.

Independent hearings protect the rights of individuals by providing a transparent and accountable process for resolving disputes or addressing allegations of wrongdoing. Officers involved in hearings will have the opportunity to present evidence, make arguments and receive a fair and impartial decision safeguarding their rights and ensuring access to justice and notably increasing public confidence in the police disciplinary process as well.

Section 207 of the CSPA, 2019, sets out the timelines for hearings related to the expungement of disciplinary records. The French version of the act indicates that the expungement hearings must be held within 30 days from when an application for a hearing is made, while the English version of the act is ambiguous. Clarity facilitates decision-making by providing clear, concise and relevant information. It will help make informed decisions based on accurate and understandable information, leading to better outcomes.

The proposed Enhancing Access to Justice Act, 2023, includes an amendment to the CSPA that states only the adjudicator must be appointed within 30 days. If passed, the proposed amendment will support the development of appropriate and responsive rules for procedure for expungement hearings.

Ontario is a province that places great value on clarity and consistency of its laws. Ontario's laws, regulations and the mandates under this government will be as clear in English as they are in French. Translating accurately ensures the original meaning and the intent of the text is preserved. A mistranslation can distort or completely alter the definition of a term, leading to misunderstandings or misinterpretations. This is critical to the front line and courts because they require careful attention to maintain the authenticity and style of the legislation.

This is why we're ensuring regulations are the same in English and in French. This is more specific to situations that vary in levels of complexity, with some cases being relatively straightforward and others more intricate or multi-faceted. The complexity of a situation affects the range of possible responses and requires careful consideration. This is why it is imperative to translate directly to avoid confusion in the legislation.

Let me give you an example of the special constables. We know it in this House: The special constables play a vital role in keeping Ontario's communities safe. Our government is very appreciative to the special constables. In late December, I marched past over 50 special constables receiving their badges at the Toronto Police College. It was a tremendous honour. But there is something wrong with the job title in the current legislation.

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Let me explain again: The French translation of “special constables” used in Ontario statutes is “agent spécial.” “Agent spécial” also appears on special constable’s uniforms, crests and badges. This is not only inconsistent with the French translation of “special constables” used in Quebec and New Brunswick, but can also be confusing in public spaces. There will be no more special agents, and special constables will be defined in French as “constables spéciaux.” The term “agent spécial” is also used in several Ontario statutes in addition to the CSPA and that’s why we’re taking action to amend this issue.

Inconsistency in French terminology between statutes causes confusion. The amendment, if passed, would change the term in all Ontario statutes upon the Community Safety and Policing Act, 2019, coming into force on the 1st of April 2024. This will make our message clear and ensure special constables will be properly identified in both languages.

Madam Speaker, I also want to bring attention to the Office of the Chief Coroner and the Office of the Fire Marshal. They both play a very critical role in our community safety.

The chief coroner oversees the provincial death investigation system, ensuring that deaths occurring in Ontario are appropriately investigated to determine the cause and manner of death. This includes deaths that are sudden and unexpected, suspicious, violent or otherwise unnatural. Through death investigations, the chief coroner, led by an exceptional individual, Dr. Dirk Huyer, helps identify public health and safety risks, trends and patterns related to causes of death. This information can inform the public and health policies, interventions and initiatives aimed at preventing future deaths.

The amendments to the Coroners Act will improve the timeliness of construction-related death investigations. We are looking, Madam Speaker, at ways of saving lives from the aspect of public safety because everyone deserves to go home from work safely each and every day.

Construction workers are the unsung heroes who help build Ontario’s infrastructure, as we’ve said it many times in this House—*parce que nous croyons en notre province et en notre avenir. Ensemble, nous bâtissons l’Ontario.* Well, who is going to build Ontario? We need the construction workers to help build Ontario, and they are.

I tell you something: When I see a construction worker working to help build Ontario, they’re not necessarily building it for us. They’re building it for our children and the next generations. Our government’s ambitious building strategy relies heavily on their efforts.

But in times of public health emergencies, natural disasters and other crises relating to issues that arise, the chief coroner again plays a critical role. They are the ones coordinating and overseeing the responses of the death investigation system by deploying resources, coordinating efforts with other agencies and ensuring timely and appropriate handling of deceased individuals.

As of now, the Office of the Chief Coroner investigates every construction-related death. This process is time-

consuming, which means providing answers to distraught families is often delayed.

Madam Speaker, currently, it takes approximately three years for an inquest to be scheduled. Waiting for an inquest can be perceived as inactivity. This leads to frustration, particularly in situations where there are no pressing deadlines due to the nature of the investigation. And this can only happen once all the regulatory investigations and prosecutions under the Occupational Health and Safety Act have been completed.

The current legislation aims to conduct a construction fatality in isolation that can potentially point to root causes that could prevent multiple deaths. The proposed changes in the act include an amendment to the Coroners Act that, if passed, would require accidental construction-related deaths be subject to a coroner-led mandatory annual review. This change, this single mandatory inquest for incidents where one or multiple deaths occur—and the review process will include industry representatives and experts. The coroner’s inquest would remain an important option where appropriate. Families would also be involved in the mandatory review process and could request that an inquest be held in addition to the review.

I feel, Madam Speaker, as we all do, for losing anyone that helps build Ontario, anyone that helps keep Ontario safe, and that’s why we have to stand with the families of the construction workers and make sure we understand the lessons that were learned. Zero construction deaths will be our goal, and we will always have the backs of all the loved ones. The proposed amendments, I believe, will lead to a broader and systemic examination of the safety issues.

I want to say also that the CSPA will seek to amend the Fire Protection and Prevention Act. Ontario has evolved over time, and the legislation needs to adapt to address these new challenges. Emerging issues and changes in circumstances ensure that legislation must remain relevant and effective in addressing contemporary needs and realities for fire.

I want to give a shout-out to our great Ontario fire marshal, Jon Pegg. Jon is an incredible individual that has gone through all the province promoting fire safety, sending a positive message that we need to work together with fire services all across Ontario, with the chiefs, with the professional firefighters, with the volunteer firefighters, with concerned individuals. I want to thank Jon for everything he does each day to keep Ontario safe.

There’s a gap in the range of enforcement tools under the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997, and we want to close these gaps.

I want to talk about the administrative monetary penalties, otherwise known as AMPs, to encourage compliance. AMP frameworks allow for monetary penalties to be imposed by authorized persons for contravention of a requirement in the act, regulation or bylaw. An authorized person may issue an AMP upon discovering that a contravention has occurred. AMPs are important because they promote compliance without requiring the commencement of a prosecution. There is currently no authority for an AMP framework under the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997.

And we heard from our stakeholders. We heard from Rob Grimwood, who leads the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs, and other stakeholders who have been advocating for this compliance for years. Given what we have been hearing from the sector, Bill 157 proposes this amendment to enable the future development of AMPs as an additional enforcement tool. This amendment enables our government to consult with stakeholders such as municipalities on an AMP framework. This will include identifying contraventions for which an AMP may be issued; determining the amount or range within which a penalty could be set; enforcement and collection, including how AMPs could be administered in unincorporated parts of Ontario; and establishing a framework to review associated impacts during the regulatory process.

This amendment within the proposed Enhancing Access to Justice Act gets to the heart of what a more efficient and streamlined justice system is about. It will eliminate unnecessary burdens on the courts and make the entire process less cumbersome and, at the same time, discourage violations of the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997.

Madam Speaker, I'll end where I started: I'm proud to be part of a government, led by Premier Ford, that has prioritized public safety. I'm proud to be part of a government, led by Premier Ford, that has reaffirmed our rights to live safely in our communities, something that belongs to all of us.

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And I've said this before: When we have safe communities, we have absolutely everything. We have a place to wake up our loved ones and see them off to school. We have a place to call our parents each day, our seniors, to make sure they're safe too. As we go to work, as we come home at the end of the day, as we shop, as we play in the park and as we pray, there is nothing more inherent to our DNA, to the fabric of who we are in this incredible quilt of Ontario, than our right to live safely. We take this very, very seriously. A big part of this trust that the community has in us ensures that justice will always remain accessible for all Ontarians. Access to justice is a fundamental right.

And I want to thank again my colleague the Attorney General for leading us through the Enhancing Access to Justice Act. We will get it done because it's the right thing to do.

For us, as we look at the Community Safety and Policing Act, this transformational piece of legislation is replacing a piece of legislation that did its time. It was introduced in another time and place. And today, in 2024, we have to ensure that we are ready and we are able to allow those people that keep us safe—nos policiers, nos pompiers, nos premiers intervenants—everybody that keeps us safe, because we can't say enough to thank them. We say we have their backs, but truth be told, actions speak louder than words, so whether we're fighting to keep these violent and repeat offenders off the streets, having strategies, as my colleagues said, to fight auto theft to ensure that wherever we go, we know there are people keeping Ontario safe.

At the end of the day, Madam Speaker, there is nothing more precious, important, something that belongs to each and every one of us individually, than a safe Ontario. It has been an honour to speak today on this piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Questions?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Good morning, colleagues. This weekend, I had the distinct honour of speaking at the Federation of Asian Canadian Lawyers. They were celebrating their 17th anniversary and there was a beautiful gala celebration. The buzz in the room was really about many different things, but once we turned to the topic of the judiciary, there were all sorts of concerns about the politicization of the judiciary. In 2021, this Conservative government gave themselves more power to control how judicial vacancies are filled, and we have now seen the government leaning pretty heavily and tripling and quadrupling down on those appointments.

I'm curious to know, to the Attorney General: How can you assure Ontarians that they are going to get fair access to the justice system without political interference?

Hon. Doug Downey: I think she's early for question period because there's nothing about that in this bill whatsoever. So I will, I guess, talk in general about access to justice, access to services, how we're making the system better not just for those who operate within the system, but for those who come into contact with the system for first time in their lives.

It is absolutely everything from the Courts Digital Transformation Initiative, a state-of-the-art, groundbreaking system that's already under way, that will be implemented, that will change how documents flow, how people access the system and how judges do their work. That's just one small piece in the grand scheme of things, a \$180-million initiative being watched all around the world to see how we're doing what we're doing.

I'll have more to say in other questions.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I want to thank the Attorney General and the Solicitor General for their statements this morning. I also want to thank them for the work that they're doing to keep our communities safe. You both work very much—you complement each other and you are both getting the job done together for the people of Ontario, so I thank you for that.

I actually want to read an email that was received. It's actually not from my riding, but Etobicoke is one big family. Her name is Ang D., and she lives in Eringate. Her question is, is this government doing enough to protect its citizens? She talks about taxes going up—and Ang, I just want you to know that that's municipal taxes that are going up, not provincial. She talks about the great work that 22 division is doing, and I want to also compliment the great work of 22 division. But they say their hands are tied—they're talking about 22 division—when the court system keeps releasing these repeat offenders. Is the government doing enough? She's asking people to contact their MPPs and their MPs, and I'm wondering if one or both of you

can comment on if the government is doing enough to protect the citizens.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank my colleague from Etobicoke–Lakeshore. Our government is not afraid to stand up and to say that these criminals who feel that they have a right to disrupt our way of life—it's not okay.

Our government has stepped up with \$51 million in investments to fight auto theft. Our government has stepped up with an over \$100-million investment to get these violent and repeat offenders off our streets. Our government has stepped up by saying we will graduate more people at the Ontario Police College, so some can come to 22 division and 23 division in Etobicoke, to keep it safe.

The changes that we have made, the investments that we have made, are fundamentally unprecedented in the history of Ontario, and that's why there has never been a government led by anyone other than Premier Ford that has prioritized public safety the way we have.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. John Fraser: I listened intently to the Attorney General's comments, and access to justice is very important, but confidence in our justice system is just as important. Last week, the Attorney General criticized the appointment by a previous government of two associate chief justices, both who had served on the bench for about a decade. Those two justices were Frank N. Marrocco and Alexandra Hoy. They served this province.

And so, given that people need to have confidence in the system, does the Attorney General think it's appropriate for the Attorney General to be criticizing the appointment of sitting judges to higher office?

Hon. Doug Downey: I think we're having a focus problem this morning, because that isn't in the bill either, Madam Speaker. I was criticizing the process by which things were happening, and those weren't the judges who were the subject of that process, but we don't need to wade into that any further.

I want to talk about how access to justice is being enhanced in Ontario through right-sizing certain processes, things that were out of date, things that weren't working. We were left by the Liberals with a legacy of broken systems and cumbersome processes. We were left with a real mess in some areas: systems that literally broke as we were coming into office, because they weren't paying any attention to it. They were so focused on other things; so focused on the politics of politics, instead of the governance of governing. It was really quite a state of affairs.

And so, we are building on the strengths that we have, we are investing hundreds of millions of dollars in our system and we're changing processes to make sure that we're keeping our communities safe.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Back to the Attorney General, who doesn't want to talk about judicial appointments,

but specifically judicial appointments are named in this bill. The government is now striking the category of cultural identity as an identifying collectible statistic, and yet we know that the government has talked about using—they're meddling with the judicial system, and one of their excuses is that they want to diversify the bench. At the same time, they're now striking this category of cultural identities.

The Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee has not published any of its annual reports since 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and probably 2023. So how can we as Ontarians actually be able to trust the justice system if the AG continues to meddle with it?

Hon. Doug Downey: I meant to mention in response to the previous question about the awards ceremony at FACL. I just wanted to congratulate Imran Emmanuel Kamal. He got both the Lawyer of Distinction Award and the Public Sector Lawyer of the Year, and I'm very pleased to see him receive that. He's a star in our Attorney General's office, doing great work on behalf of the public. For the Clerks, I have written out the name and the award so that you can follow along. I know the paper is coming.

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Madam Speaker, we are doing so many things to make the system better, faster, more accessible, more affordable, more efficient. We are making changes across the board. The technical changes that are being referenced in this bill in terms of statistics are aligning us with the new current requirements, so it's not really getting rid of anything. It's an alignment so that we have consistency.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I would like to thank the minister for those changes. This government has made a lot of changes in regulation under the Victims' Bill of Rights to the list of crimes where victims can sue their offenders for emotional distress, like aggressive assault, sexual offences, crimes against minors, human trafficking and hate crimes. We extended that to terrorism, motor vehicle theft, sexual offenders and hate-related crimes. How it is difficult to prove the emotional suffering—and how the proposed changes to allow victims to be presumed to have suffered emotionally can help victims not to be retraumatized again and again when this happens?

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm pleased to speak to this. I really want to thank the committee again. I did it in my speech, but all parties were keenly interested in parts of this bill. Some amendments came through the committee and that just proves the value of committee members and what the committee can do by hearing from the public and from stakeholders even further than we had.

I'm really pleased to know that we can put victims in a position where they don't have to relive and re-explain how they are affected. If you can imagine, a human trafficking victim would otherwise have to explain how being trafficked affected them. We're taking away that secondary trauma. I think it's just absolutely the right thing to do and I hope the opposition supports us on this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): There is not enough time for another question. There is not enough time for further debate.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

NATURAL GAS RATES

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I rise to react to a recent government announcement about the Ontario Electricity Support Program—OESP—that brings warmth to some yet leaves a chilling gap in our fight for energy affordability. Last year, I called for urgent action against soaring gas bills and for expanding this program to include other energy sources, a call that remains unanswered.

Our government prefers corporations over people. Last week, the government announced they would reverse the OEB's decision—their own regulatory board decision—that would lower heating costs for families across Ontario. Instead, this government would subsidize Enbridge—the same corporation that doubled heating bills for their customers in 2022. When criticized, this Conservative government's response was very predictable: pointing fingers at the federal policy that they cannot influence; finger-wagging at provincial solutions that put affordability before rich corporations; sitting on their hands while families shiver.

This isn't just about electricity, it is about gas, about warmth, which every Ontario home deserves but many cannot afford. Today I stand before you, urging an extension of the OESP to include gas bill relief. This is not a political issue, it is a matter of addressing affordability. Whether you use electricity or gas to heat your home, no one in our prosperous province should have to choose between heating their home and other essentials of life.

NEXT GENERATION 9-1-1 PROGRAM

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I was happy to announce last month with my Peel colleagues that the Ontario government is providing Peel Regional Police with over \$3 million and the Peel Joint Fire Communications Centre with \$1.8 million for the transition to Next Generation 9-1-1.

Next Generation 9-1-1 is a new system that will allow 911 dispatchers to receive text messages, data and GPS coordinates from the public. This will allow for better and faster emergency responses when people need it most. And last month, we heard the big news: On February 21, at 3:30 a.m., Peel Regional Police became the first large communications centre in Canada to successfully finish the transition to Next Generation 9-1-1.

Speaker, this is a huge milestone for emergency services here in Canada. With this new technology, we will finally be brought into the 21st century. I am very excited for this new technology and want to thank everyone who played a role in making this happen, and a special thanks

to the heroes of Peel police working everyday to keep us safe.

MOIS DE LA FRANCOPHONIE

M. Stéphane Sarrazin: En tant que député de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, représentant une large majorité francophone, je me dois de souligner que nous débutons le mois de mars, qui est le Mois de la Francophonie. Le mois de mars, dédié à la Francophonie, est célébré partout dans le monde afin de promouvoir la langue française et sa diversité.

La langue française rassemble en effet les communautés de cinq continents. Cette célébration, qui a lieu autour de la Journée internationale de la Francophonie du 20 mars, les rapproche et favorise le dialogue. Environ 9,5 millions de personnes au Canada, dont près de 700 000 en Ontario, font vivre et rayonner la langue française. D'un bout à l'autre du pays, ces personnes d'expression française ont le français comme langue maternelle ou sont d'origines diverses issues de l'immigration, ou encore, sont anglophones et allophones ayant choisi d'apprendre et de vivre en français.

J'ai eu l'opportunité durant les deux dernières années de représenter les parlementaires francophones des Amériques en tant que chargé de mission de l'Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie. J'ai eu la chance d'échanger avec des parlementaires de partout à travers le monde et de discuter des défis auxquels ils sont confrontés.

Dans les prochains mois, je passerai le flambeau à un parlementaire du Nouveau-Brunswick, et j'aimerais remercier les membres de l'APF, section Ontario, pour m'avoir fait confiance en me confiant cette mission. Et en terminant, j'aimerais souhaiter un joyeux Mois de la Francophonie à tous les francophones et francophiles de l'Ontario.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, as you would be well aware, last year, 2023, was the hottest year on record and the expectation is that this year will be even hotter. We are really starting to push the limits on what is happening globally in terms of heating. We are setting ourselves up for dramatic changes in the world around us that we will not want to have to encounter.

We are all well aware of the Smokehouse fire in Texas and the fact that the smoke from that conflagration is visible here in Canada. The consequences of global heating, drought, wildfires, flooding are visible around the world.

Speaker, to even stabilize the global climate—not to pull back on the damage that has happened, but to even stabilize it—we need to reduce emissions in Ontario by 50% by 2030.

As people are well aware, this government has set an irresponsible target of 30%. It will not do what is needed

to be done. It will not show the leadership that, as an advanced industrial society, Ontario should be setting.

We need this government to change course. It needs to set a target of 50% reduction of emissions by 2030. It needs to put in place the investments, the policies and the programs to actually deliver on that. Failure to do that will cause damage that all of us will regret for the rest of our lives.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Mr. Brian Saunderson: It's a pleasure to rise this morning to talk about a topic that's close to my heart and very closely connected to my riding of Simcoe–Grey. Currently, the 2024 Canada Special Olympics National Winter Games are taking place in Calgary, Alberta. And recently, the town of Blue Mountains celebrated the 25th anniversary of hosting the sixth Special Olympics World Winter Games in 1997—only the second time it was held outside of the US—when 2,000 athletes representing 73 countries descended onto the town of Blue Mountains to celebrate their sports.

The town of Blue Mountains has established a strong relationship with the Special Olympics movement as being home to the alpine ski program since that time. Eight of the 12 members of the Ontario alpine ski team are from the riding of Simcoe–Grey, and I want to recognize each of them: Robin Shuter, Erin Wright, Matthew Fields, Eddie Bunkowsky, Kevin Lachance, Jamie Hall, Julian Hudson and Angel Blainey—all from the riding Simcoe–Grey. They are joined by their teammates, Cameron Oliver, Carter Simpson, Ryan Sorley and Ben So.

I've recently learned they are coming home with at least three medals after spectacular performances, and I want to congratulate all of them. They've done a great job representing Ontario.

1020

Their motto is, "Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave at the attempt." They have certainly been brave, and they've represented us well. Many of them will go on next year to Turin to represent Canada.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

ADDICTION SERVICES

Miss Monique Taylor: Yesterday, I spoke with individuals who are currently living in tents outside of Hamilton city hall in solidarity for the almost 2,000 unhoused citizens across our city. They're calling for solutions to the lack of housing options, both temporary and permanent, including wraparound services to support their health and safety.

Many of our homeless are facing other multiple challenges and crises at the same time, some in the form of addictions like opioids or other street drugs. This poly-crisis is amplified by now another provincial decision in health care: the distribution of naloxone kits. On February 9, an executive order was issued without notice or

consultation, changing our local community agencies' access to these life-saving kits.

In Hamilton, overdoses don't always happen within walking distance to a pharmacy, within their operating hours or within sight of someone carrying life-saving Narcan; it is often organizations and outreach groups who are on the streets, in our shelter systems or part of our health teams who are handing out these kits 24/7.

We need to support those who are doing this important work and call to action when decisions are made that cause harm rather than good.

This is an epidemic. We need solutions, not barriers. All levels of government need to ensure that there is immediate access to life-saving tools, affordable housing and wraparound supports that will save lives.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN AND THE LAW

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the National Association of Women and the Law, which celebrated its 50th anniversary at an event I had the honour of attending in Ottawa last week. The founders of NAWL were not only visionaries but also dear friends from the University of Ottawa law school.

Since 1974, NAWL has been at the forefront of feminist advocacy and law reform in Canada. Through the tireless efforts of founders Diane Ansell, Shirley Greenberg, Lynn Kaye, Maria Linhares de Sousa, Peggy Mason, Maureen McTeer and many others who followed in their footsteps, NAWL spearheaded groundbreaking initiatives that have reshaped our legal landscape and advanced the cause of gender equality. NAWL was the catalyst for change, challenging entrenched societal norms regarding sexual violence, advocating for key amendments to the Criminal Code and the Divorce Act and a new family law reform act. Its contributions to sections 15 and 28 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms were pivotal in ensuring equality and justice for all Canadians.

Women across Canada owe a debt of gratitude to NAWL for the groundbreaking work they have advanced over the last 50 years, forever changing our nation's legal framework.

As we look forward, I would like to recognize its achievements, and I remain steadfast in our shared goal to end violence against women and children through legal, social and legislative reform.

MITCHELL DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR BOYS BASKETBALL TEAM

Mr. Matthew Rae: It's my pleasure to rise in this place today to talk about a small high school sports team with a ton of grit and determination. The Mitchell District High School senior boys basketball team recently secured the WOSSAA single-A championship. The Blue Devils beat the reigning champions, Woodstock Collegiate Institute, 62-52 in the semifinals. In the finals against London Christian, the Blue Devils came out strong, but London trailed by just one, after the first eight minutes. Alen Chen

led the surge in the second quarter, scoring nine of his 15 points. Jared Vosper, Charlie Geiger and Kale Murray all contributed to the offensive comeback. Blake Redfern finished with 27 points for the Blue Devils. Coach Moses utilized all the players in the final. In the end, the Blue Devils beat London Christian school 86-52 in the WOSSAA finals and punched their ticket to the OFSAA championships. The boys take the court at OFSAA today in Welland.

Speaker, it was 40 years ago when the MDHS senior boys basketball team last won the OFSAA single-A championship, and the boys have high hopes for this year's tournament. The secret to their success, according to Coach Moses, is effort and attitude.

To Sam, Jack, Luke, Charlie, Ryan, Will, Jared, Blake, Lincoln, Alen, Kale, Tayden, Brock, Talbot and Elijah: Best of luck at OFSAA, and know the entire community stands behind you.

Go, Blue Devils!

OAK BRIDGE ACADEMY

Mr. Brian Riddell: I'm delighted to rise today in grateful acknowledgement and support of Oak Bridge Academy. Oak Bridge Academy, or OBA, is an independent, not-for-profit school for neurodiverse children in my riding of Cambridge. It is the place where high-needs kids on the autism spectrum go to learn and thrive, and this is important because, really, there are not that many places in Ontario for these children to go.

As an independent school and registered charity, Oak Bridge Academy relies exclusively on small donations and tuition fees to fund its world-class programs—even so, educators from England are coming over to Cambridge to see how they handle their situations with the students in our country. However, this may soon change. Tomorrow, Oak Bridge Academy will compete in a Waterloo region competition to determine which not-for-profit organization makes the strongest case for support, through the Social Venture Partners Perfect Pitch competition. School representatives, who would be in the gallery today if they weren't in dress rehearsal right now, will take the stage with other not-for-profit executive leaders to showcase the incredible work being done in our community to support those in need; more so, they will speak to the innovative, cost-effective and inspiring programs that make the difference for so many of my people who live in Cambridge.

I'd like to thank Oak Bridge Academy for serving not only as an educational path of last resort for families living with autism, but also as a provider for first-class neurodiverse programming. I'm so proud to represent you in the House today.

Good luck tomorrow, Oak Bridge Academy.

MEMBER FOR LEEDS–GRENVILLE– THOUSAND ISLANDS AND RIDEAU LAKES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Nepean.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a pleasure to rise today. Today is obviously an important day for my colleague from Leeds and Grenville. Mr. Steve Clark, 14 years ago today, was elected to this assembly. He was elected with 66% of the vote, and we're wondering where the other 34% has gone.

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

WEARING OF T-SHIRT

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Joel Harden: I ask my colleagues for unanimous consent to proudly wear a T-shirt for the Carleton Ravens, because the women—the defending national champions of basketball in this country—just won the provincial championship on Saturday, and coach Dani Sinclair is coach of Ontario.

1030

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa Centre is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to allow him to wear the Carleton Ravens T-shirt. Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to inform the House that we are visited today by a former member, Gordon Walker, the member for London South in the 31st and 32nd provincial Parliaments. Welcome back to the Legislature. It's great to have you here.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I'd like to welcome members of Connecting GTA from my riding, the great city of Pickering—they're all over the place.

I'd like to welcome Karishma Kazim, Vithu Ramachandran, Jasica Mahalingam, Anchana Bala and my good friend Darshan Sritharan. Welcome to your House.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Today, I would like to introduce my new OLIP intern, Milena Basciano.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Today, I'd like to welcome the parents of my page, Colin Niu. His parents, Ben Niu and Alena Li, are here with us today as proud parents. Ben and Alena, we're honoured to have you here at Queen's Park to watch how your son is being nurtured here as a great citizen of Ontario.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'd like to welcome Brian Marks, Henry Wall and Mike Nadeau. They serve as CAOs for their respective district service administration boards in Cochrane, Kenora and Sault Ste. Marie. Welcome to the House.

I'd also like to acknowledge Max Wen, our exemplary page from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill.

Mr. Will Bouma: I'd like to welcome my friend Ian DeWaard to the House today and representatives from CLAC. Make sure you head over to rooms 228 and 230 at lunchtime.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: It's my sincere privilege to welcome Evan Cameron from the OLIP program into my office for the next couple of months. I'm delighted to have you with us, Evan, and it's great to have you at Queen's Park.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I'd like to welcome the mother of one of our pages, Lorna Coulter, who is also an alumni page, to the House today. I'm looking forward to having lunch with her and Skye later today.

Mr. Brian Riddell: I'd like to welcome to the House today Pauline Cantin from Riverbend retirement home. She's an employee there. Welcome to the House.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: This morning, I'd like to welcome members of the Schickedanz family: Jordan MacDonald, Joe DiMatteo and especially seven-year-old Ellie, who is visiting Queen's Park for the first time. Welcome to your House.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: It's my great pleasure to introduce my good friend Jenny Chen, York Region District School Board trustee for Markham, ward 1 and ward 8. She's a strong advocate for the rights of children and parents in the schools of Markham.

I would also like to introduce her husband, Timothy Huang, and two first-time guests to Queen's Park, Shayne Yang from William Lyon Mackenzie Collegiate Institute and Vivian Zhang from Bill Hogarth Secondary School. Welcome to the Legislature of Ontario.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to welcome Ian DeWaard, Andre van Heerden, Leigh-Ann Ulch, Rhonda Gow and Stephanie—sorry, Stephanie; I forgot your last name. Welcome to Queen's Park. They're talking about long-term care, home care and retirement homes.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Today, I'd like to welcome into the House the Connecting GTA team with Suresh and his group. They're here for a women in business event today. Thank you and welcome to your House.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I'd like to welcome to the chamber today Pam Mulder from Vineland, who is an RN with Shalom Manor, and Stephanie Hollender, who is a PSW with Heidehof homes and a resident of St. Catharines. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our introduction of visitors this morning. I want to thank the members for keeping their introductions brief and to the point.

Mr. John Fraser: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: I seek unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 45(b)(iv), the time for debate on opposition day motion number 1 on highway tolls be apportioned as follows: 56 minutes to each of the recognized parties and eight minutes to the independent members as a group.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Fraser is seeking the unanimous consent of the House that, notwithstanding standing order 45(b)(iv), the time for debate on opposition day motion number 1 on highway tolls be apportioned as

follows: 56 minutes to each of the recognized parties and eight minutes to the independent members as a group.

Agreed? I heard a no.

I want to acknowledge that we are meeting on lands traditionally inhabited by Indigenous peoples. We pay our respects to the many Indigenous nations who have gathered here and continue to gather here, including the Mississauga of the Credit. Meegwetch.

This morning we have with us, in the public gallery, the Brown Junior Public School choir from the riding of Toronto—St. Paul's to perform O Canada and God Save the King. Please stand and join them in the singing our national and royal anthems.

Singing of the national anthem / Chant de l'hymne national.

Singing of the royal anthem / Chant de l'hymne royal.
Applause.

1040

BRIAN MULRONEY

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the House to observe a moment of silence in remembrance of the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney, 18th Prime Minister of Canada, who sadly passed away on Thursday, February 29, 2024.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to observe a moment of silence in remembrance of the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney, 18th Prime Minister of Canada, who sadly passed away on Thursday, February 29, 2024. Agreed? Agreed.

Members will please rise.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Members may take their seats.

QUESTION PERIOD

HIGHWAY TOLLS

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Speaker. This question is for the Premier. Two weeks ago, this government announced a bill to remove tolls on all the highways that don't have tolls, while keeping the tolls on the one highway that has them.

In promoting the bill, the transportation minister said people are "feeling the pinch in their wallets. The last thing they need to see is another unnecessary fee or toll coming their way."

So with this in mind, Speaker, and to the Premier: Will the government support our motion this afternoon to remove tolls for truck drivers using Highway 407?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond, the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Mr. Speaker, there are only two parties that have ever introduced tolls on the highways and that was under the NDP government and the previous Liberal government.

Everything that we do as a government in this House has been to keep costs low, whether that's fighting the carbon tax—the carbon tax can cost long-haul truck drivers \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year. That's money that could go to their families to put more food on their tables, that could put them through school.

Mr. Speaker, this is about supporting truckers. They want us to build Highway 413 and they sent a strong message to that member and the previous Liberal government about their inaction to build infrastructure across this province. That's why we will continue to keep costs low, fight the carbon tax and build Ontario.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, I'm just going to bring it back to the issue that I asked a question about, which is Highway 407, which is completely underused. You could land an airplane on it—and I mean, literally an airplane landed on it right in the middle of the day with no problem. The highway is underused because the tolls are too high and, in fact, the private operator set the tolls so high that the ministry was going to have to charge over a billion dollars in congestion penalties, but they never collected it.

My question back to the Premier is, why did the Premier let the private 407 operator keep that billion dollars instead of using it to bring down these sky-high tolls?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Mr. Speaker, when that member and the previous Liberal government had an opportunity to remove tolls on the 412 and 418, what did they do? Absolutely nothing. In fact, when our government put forward in our budget the opportunity for that party and the previous Liberal government to support our move to remove tolls off the 412 and 418, what did they do? They voted against that motion and against those measures. They don't care about truck drivers; they don't care about drivers.

We want to build Highway 413. We actually even put forward measures to reduce the gas tax by close to 10 cents a litre, and what did that member do? They voted against that cost-saving measure for families. It's about putting more money back into the pockets of hard-working families. Whether it's fighting the carbon tax or reducing the gas tax, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to support families and support drivers across this province.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Actually, the NDP campaigned for years to remove the tolls on the 412 and 418 and we are proud we were able to get them removed. But why stop there? Why stop there, Speaker? It can cost a trucker as much as \$60 per trip. Meanwhile, Highway 401 is overused; commuters are stuck in traffic. The NDP, truck drivers, transportation experts and environmental advocates have all called on the government to remove

Highway 407 tolls for trucks. Getting some trucks off Highway 401 and onto the 407 is better for truckers and it's better for all the drivers too. It's a common-sense change, but I'm hearing a lot of excuses from the other side.

So, Speaker, why is the Premier so afraid of taking on the private operator of Highway 407?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Mr. Speaker, every step of the way, we have been there for truck drivers, whether that's about supporting and building the 413; whether it's about removing tolls on the 412 and 418; or whether it's about reducing or fighting the carbon tax. In fact, that member could make a phone call to her federal counterpart and ask them to support this government's position to reduce costs for truckers—not only truckers, but everyday drivers, Mr. Speaker, who are punished by this carbon tax for just taking their kids to work or going to school.

This side of the House will continue to support measures that will put more money back in your pockets, but we'll also continue to support measures that will build critical infrastructure like the Highway 413 that we so desperately need. I ask that member to come visit our ridings in Brampton and Mississauga so they can see first-hand the gridlock. We're seeing record population growth. We need more highways and we need new highways, and that's why we're going to build Highway 413.

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, I'll point out that that's going to take 10 years and billions of dollars, but they could do something to provide relief tomorrow.

Last week, we asked the government about their decision to give a multi-million dollar contract to PricewaterhouseCoopers to develop a digital tribunal system without allowing any other company to compete for the contract. We know that the NDP government in BC has been able to deliver results, but this government should know that we can't copy and paste a digital tribunal system from BC to Ontario. And, in fact, their system is far less complex than our Landlord and Tenant Board. So there is no question that this project required a made-in-Ontario plan.

To the Premier: Why does your government let this project proceed without ensuring it would be compatible with the needs of Ontarians?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: I sent the letter over to the Leader of the Opposition last week and I don't know if she read it, but it's pretty clear in there that this would be a transformative change for us built on the BC experience. And very clearly, Mr. Speaker, it was in the 2021 budget

twice, if they cared to read that. I doubt they read the budget. They voted against it.

1050

We are enhancing services for the public. We are making sure that people have access to fair and timely matters. We were left with an entirely broken system by the Liberal government. We actually had to hand bomb notices and do things manually because the system failed that we inherited from that Liberal government, supported by that NDP government.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, despite what the government says about where this idea came from, we have learned that Ontario was well on its way to developing our own digital system prior to giving PwC a sole-source contract. There were already years and millions of dollars invested, in fact, Premier, into a made-in-Ontario digital platform that was planning to launch in 2019, but that project was thrown out. The government hasn't given any reason to justify why. It seems like they used this just as another excuse to line the pockets of a private company.

Back to the Premier, given the skyrocketing costs of this contract, now at least \$26 million and counting, did the government and Ontario taxpayers save any money by abandoning the original project?

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm not going to take business acumen or advice from the NDP about how you get things done. We are getting things done. In fact, the system that we scaled from BC, from a smaller tribunal to our largest tribunal that receives over 80,000 applications a year—it is quite a scale.

Now, I'll tell you, this isn't just an idea that we're percolating, that we're moving along, that we're saying will be ready sometime. It's actually running. We ran it parallel with the old system. Now, it's fully functioning and doing very well and doing high volume.

Again, the opposition says, "Well, why didn't you do it a different way?" Well, because we did it the right way.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Tell that, Speaker, to the people who are waiting: 53,000 unresolved cases at the Landlord and Tenant Board right now, and the number keeps growing. Long backlogs at tribunals mean that Ontarians are waiting months, even years, to have their cases heard under this government. Under this government, the wait-list has quadrupled, and the tribunal is handling fewer applications every single year since this Premier formed government in 2018. The government needs to come to grips with the fact that technology is a tool, not a plan.

I want my question to go back to the Premier: Will he start investing in staff and courtroom services and stop sending good money after bad to Bay Street firms?

Hon. Doug Downey: Well, I guess they did not only not read the 2021 budget, they didn't read the 2022 or the 2023 budgets either. We have been investing. We have doubled the number of adjudicators. We have hired more staff. In fact, applications are up 31% over last year, and

we are still driving the number down. From 2014 until when we took office, there was an excess of cases over those resolved every single year under the Liberal government, with the assistance of the NDP.

Again, if facts matter, I will be taking no direction from the NDP on this. We are getting the job done. The numbers are coming down. People are getting their cases heard. Orders are going out 90% of the time within 30 days at this point. We have some excellent metrics, and we are getting in the right direction, notwithstanding they vote against every single investment that we make in the system.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé.

Last week, hundreds of people in Kingston got up at 3 a.m. to go stand outside in the cold and wind for a chance to gain access to primary care. How can the minister explain that?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As we expand access to primary care practitioners across Ontario, the member opposite of course will know that we have 78 new primary care expansions happening in the province of Ontario. I completely understand the enthusiasm and interest in Kingston for those accessing primary care. Obviously, our preferred route would be to make sure that they can go through the Ontario portal to make sure that they get assessed and assigned to a primary care practitioner.

But again, in Kingston alone, notwithstanding the primary care expansion that the member opposite referenced, as part of the expansion we also have the Periwinkle model. I will quote the organizer of that application, saying, "If you need to see a nurse practitioner, you'll see a nurse practitioner. If you need to see a doctor, you'll see a doctor. If you need to see a primary care clinician, a dietitian, you will see the appropriate"—

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

Supplementary question?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Sick, frail, elderly people standing outside for hours in February: This is happening under this minister's watch. Everyone agrees the solution is interdisciplinary care, where physicians work alongside nurses, social workers, dietitians, health promoters.

The minister has received solutions from hundreds and hundreds of communities. Why are you only willing to help 78 of them?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: We have tripled the investment. We have \$110 million available for expansions across Ontario. We are making sure that people get access to primary care multidisciplinary teams in the province of Ontario.

With the greatest respect to the opposition, to suggest that you can just open up and say, "Go ahead and hire"—we need to do the work. And we have done the work, with the Minister of Colleges and Universities, expanding the number of seats available for training nurses, for training

lab technicians, for training the paramedics, for training nurse practitioners.

We are doing that work and we will continue to do that work. But to suggest in any way that a \$110-million investment, 78 new and expanded primary care is not enough? We will continue to do the work; you'll continue to vote against it.

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

Next question?

TAXATION

Mr. Anthony Leardi: My question is for the Minister of Energy. As we all know, the federal carbon tax is unnecessarily increasing the cost of everything that Ontario needs on a daily basis. Like our Premier said, the delivery of every product we have in this province is being affected by the worst tax this country has ever seen. It's a useless tax. That's the federal carbon tax.

We continue to remain laser-focused on keeping costs down for Ontario families and businesses, but the carbon tax is working against us. Mr. Speaker, can the minister please explain how the carbon tax is driving up costs for Ontarians in everyday life and what we need to do to keep costs down?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks very much to the member from Essex for another great question. The cost of the carbon tax isn't just affecting the price at the pumps, it's affecting the price of everything. The Minister of Agriculture certainly knows this. It's affecting the price at the farm gate because the farmers are putting fuel in their tractors, the farmers are using fuel to dry their grains, the transportation it takes to get those products to the food terminal and to the grocery store; it's driving up the cost of everything.

Last week, we had a debate here on energy costs and the NDP expressed their fake concern about the cost of energy. We know that in three weeks' time, the federal government is going to be increasing the carbon tax by another 23%. If members of this Legislature wanted to make a difference, they'd phone their buddies Jagmeet and Justin and they would put a pause on that federal carbon tax—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Thank you to the minister for his response. This is exactly why our government spoke up about the carbon tax and why we fought it tooth and nail all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. It's ludicrous that the federal Liberals intentionally disregarded the welfare of most people in Ontario by blatantly ignoring how the carbon tax is leading to increased home energy costs.

The most concerning part is that it's only going to get worse from here. The federal government and the opposition Liberals and NDP want to nearly triple the tax by 2030. That is unacceptable. Can the minister explain why Ontario families cannot afford the tax increases that

the Liberals and the NDP want to foist on the hard-working people of Ontario?

1100

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks again to the member from Essex, who really cares about making sure that people in his riding and across the province can afford to eat, at the end of the day.

During his question, we just had a member from the NDP say, "Get over it. Get over the carbon tax."

There's one party in this Legislature that actually cares about affordability, whether it's decreasing the cost of the gasoline tax, whether it's removing tolls from our highways or taking away the licence fees on our plates. There's one party focused on driving down the cost of living, and it's Premier Ford and our Progressive Conservative Party.

It's real simple. April 1 is coming. The federal carbon tax is set to rise again by 23% in just over three weeks' time. Will the members of the NDP just say, "Get over it," or will they call Jagmeet and will they demand that Justin Trudeau put a pause on the federal carbon tax so people can afford to live in our country?

DRIVER EXAMINATION CENTRES

MPP Lise Vaugeois: In December, the Auditor General identified major concerns about the ministry's decision to lower the standards to earn a driver's licence. Some drivers are being trained and tested on a single route. Drivers with repeat suspensions, if not required to retrain, are responsible for six times the rate of fatal collisions.

The Auditor General's report is clear: A lack of standards and oversight at DriveTest centres is leading to an increase in serious accidents.

Minister, when will you return DriveTest requirements to their previous higher standard?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Our government takes the safety of all road users very seriously. Ontario has the safest roads in all of North America due to the many measures that we have put in place to ensure that our roads remain safe.

In January 2023, our government mandated the use of electronic logging for commercial vehicles.

We're helping improve driver safety, road safety.

Mr. Speaker, we've also introduced legislation like the MOMS Act, which increases and makes driver's licence suspensions even longer. It increases impoundment periods, as well, for those who aren't safe on our roads, especially in the form of stunt driving as well as street racing and aggressive driving.

We will continue to focus on keeping road safety as a top priority and do whatever we can to maintain the strongest and highest forms of road safety across this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: My office received a copy of a memo from the vice-president of Serco, the private company that operates numerous DriveTest centres in Ontario. Information in the memo identifies fraudulent

road test passes and false experience being added to driver records. Not only have the test standards been lowered by the ministry, even these lower standards are not being met.

What is the minister doing to make sure that all those receiving drivers' licences are trained to the highest standards and have legitimately completed all the requirements?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Mr. Speaker, our government has maintained the strongest forms of road safety across this province and across North America. Actually, when you look at Canada and the entire country, we have the strongest and most strict measures for G licensing, in this province, in Ontario, and that's because of our commitment to road safety and our commitment to ensuring that we have safe roads.

That's why we continue to introduce pieces of legislation like the MOMS Act, which will increase suspensions and penalties on those who are not safe. If you're stunt driving or street racing, we will ensure that your vehicle is impounded and that you are also charged for those incidents.

I would like to state for the members here that those individuals, when they had an opportunity to be stronger and support measures on road safety, didn't support them. They didn't vote to increase and lengthen suspension periods on those driving recklessly on our roads. We'll continue to ensure that we support safety across all—

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

The next question.

TAXATION

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. At a time when the cost of living continues to rise, the federal government is making things worse with a punitive carbon tax. Residents in Brampton West tell me life is becoming more expensive, particularly as the carbon tax pushes up the cost of fuel.

Many families in my riding rely on their car to get to work every day. They experience the consequences of the federal carbon tax every time they fill up at the pumps. This carbon tax is unfair, and it is hurting hard-working families and individuals across the province.

Our government must continue to provide support and relief for Ontarians, especially at a time when the federal government is turning its back on us. Can the minister please tell the House what our government is doing to help ease the carbon tax burden for the people of this province?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you very much to the member for Brampton West on his advocacy against this carbon tax. The federal government is about to increase this tax by 23%, so that member is absolutely right in being concerned for families across Brampton that can't afford that increase. People are being punished for driving their kids to school, for driving to work, for driving to take their kids to extracurricular activities, and that's not right. That's why this government has always been

steadfast in our commitment to ensuring that we fight the carbon tax.

Not only that, we're also decreasing the cost of the fuel tax by 10 cents a litre. That's because we want to put more money back into families' pockets so they can do what they want with that money, whether it's take their kids out for a meal, whether it's put their kids in an extracurricular activity. We'll continue to fight this carbon tax every step of the way.

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

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you to the Minister of Transportation for his response. It is encouraging to see our government's continued efforts in standing up for Ontarians and fighting against the federal carbon tax. This is especially important for commuters across the province who rely on their cars to travel to work or to see their families and friends.

Mr. Speaker, at a time when Canadians are seeing costs go up everywhere, the federal Liberals are raising taxes. The people of Ontario should not be forced to pay more to fuel their cars. While our government demonstrated much-needed leadership and reduced the gasoline tax, the federal government did not. We must continue to call on the federal government to eliminate the carbon tax completely and to help deliver true affordability for Ontario families. Can the minister please share with this House how our government is protecting commuters from this costly federal carbon tax?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: It's clear that the federal Liberals are completely out of touch with the concerns of residents, especially in places like Brampton and Mississauga and all across this province. I can't believe that they're willing to increase the carbon tax by 23%. This is not something the families of Brampton and across this province can afford right now.

But not only that, they have a federal environment minister that says he doesn't want to build any more roads or highways. We're seeing record population growth. That's why we're ensuring that we're making those investments, not only to fight the carbon tax but to build roads, to build highways.

But on top of that, we're reducing the cost of gas by 10 cents. But on top of that, we're also making sure that we freeze fees on photo cards and also on drivers' licences. And two years ago, we also reduced the val tags and removed that fee, saving a family \$125 per car or truck. We will continue to make life more affordable for families and fight against the carbon tax.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: My question is to the Premier. Systemic anti-Black racism is prevalent in our society and has negative impacts on the health of Black Ontarians. Anti-Black racism takes a toll on mental health, despite the resilience of Black communities.

Black community organizations such as TAIBU and Tropicana Community Services have asked Ontario to

recognize the first Monday of March as Black Mental Health Day to raise awareness and highlight the impact of anti-Black racism on mental health.

To the Premier: There is a bill on the order paper to do just that, and we could pass it today. Will he commit to recognizing Black Mental Health Day in Ontario?

1110

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism.

Hon. Michael D. Ford: Thank you very much for the question, of course following Black History Month, in which we had the opportunity to celebrate across the province ending anti-Black racism and really uplifting the diversity of our communities, including Ontario's Black community.

That is why we are, on a number of fronts, making critical investments to make sure that our Black community and all communities here in the province of Ontario can get ahead. We're doing that under the leadership of the Minister of Economic Development, creating strong jobs for the future; under the Minister of Transportation, in making sure that we are connecting our diverse communities to the jobs the minister is creating right across the province; and of course, in my ministry, making those strong investments to fight anti-Black racism and uplift our diverse communities. It's a priority for us, under the leadership of the Premier.

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Part of the efforts to recognize Black Mental Health Day is to address the barriers and burdens of anti-Black racism on mental health. Children are waiting for two years for mental health care, and it takes longer if you're Black. There are mental health and addictions states of emergency across this province, which hit harder if you're Black. It doesn't feel like this government appreciates the urgency of the issue.

Back to the Premier: What sources will he commit to today to deliver culturally appropriate mental health services to Black Ontarians?

Hon. Michael D. Ford: Thank you very much again. Under the leadership of the Premier, we have been making strong investments as a government in combatting anti-Black racism and raising up our Black community. That is why, particularly, I would like to reference our anti-racism strategic plan in the province, where we invested \$132 million in combatting racism in all its forms, but particularly around economic development, supporting children and youth, specifically anti-racism and anti-hate initiatives, as well as policy and accountable measures across 14 ministries. Making sure that all Ontarians can succeed is an all-of-government approach, and we will continue to do just that.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. The "get it done wrong" act will make affordability and the climate crisis worse.

Imposing expensive sprawl onto municipalities will increase property taxes to line the pockets of land speculators. It will force young people into long, expensive commutes just to find a place to rent, let alone a home to own. That is why Greens are working so hard to legalize housing, creating more choices and more opportunities for first-time homebuyers to buy homes they can afford in the communities they love.

Speaker, will the Premier stop avoiding debate on housing solutions and get it done for people, not speculators, by supporting my bill to end exclusionary zoning and legalize homes that people can afford in the communities they love?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, from day one, we have been focused on building more homes for the people of the province of Ontario. What you hear typically from the opposition parties are more obstacles being put in the way of actually getting more homes and more shovels in the ground, just like all around him. He is surrounded by a former Liberal caucus that did just that: They put obstacles in the way of building more homes.

What we're seeing now, with us, is housing supply action plans which see rental housing starts at their highest level ever in the province of Ontario, and over the last three years, we are starting to see new housing starts increase and increase. This is despite the high-interest-rate policies of the federal Liberal government, the high carbon-tax policies which are putting so many people out of the market for that new home.

So what we're going to do is return the dream of home ownership to the people of the province of Ontario by getting more shovels in the ground, reducing costs and removing obstacles.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Respectfully, people are sick and tired of waiting for this government to put forward housing solutions that work for ordinary people, not speculators.

Let's look at places that are succeeding: Guelph is on track to meet its housing targets; Kitchener has exceeded their housing targets. Both have legalized fourplexes and elected Greens, by the way.

If just 18% of existing single-family homes became a fourplex, that would be two million homes, Speaker. But that requires putting affordable homes ahead of speculators.

So, Speaker, I'm going to give the minister an opportunity today: Will the government say yes to legalizing housing, yes to fourplexes across the province?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, when I look at who is getting the job done, I see Conservatives across the province of Ontario who are getting the job done. I was very happy to be in Brampton, where they smashed through their housing target. I was very happy to be with the Minister of Long-Term Care when we were in Stouffville, because Stouffville not only smashed through the target—239% over the target, Mr. Speaker. When you

look at those municipalities that are doing what we've asked them to do: removing obstacles, reducing taxes, getting shovels in the ground faster by approving permits quicker—those municipalities, which have followed the housing supply action plans brought forward by this government, are meeting their targets.

Now, it should be no surprise that where Liberals are in charge, those targets aren't being met. I look at Burlington; I look at Mississauga—two municipalities that can't get it done for their community, but all around them, they can, Mr. Speaker.

We're going to make sure that every municipality reaches that target for the people of the province of Ontario.

TAXATION

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My question is for the Minister of Energy. This government has always known that the carbon tax is driving up energy prices across this province, and it's why we're using every tool in our tool box to keep costs down and ensure that Ontarians have access to affordable and reliable energy.

But, Speaker, while this government is serious about making life more affordable for Ontarians, we've seen Liberal governments like the Trudeau Liberals in Ottawa pick and choose who gets relief from this unnecessary tax. The federal government announced an exemption but only for home heating oil. This has understandably led to frustration and anger from many of my residents, who are trying to ensure that they're able to heat their home with other sources of energy.

So, Speaker, could the minister please tell this House how the federal carbon tax is negatively hurting Ontarians, people like my residents, with the cost of home heating?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks very much to the great member from Niagara for a great question this morning.

The federal Liberals obviously have come to the realization that their carbon tax is driving up the cost of home heating for people—but only in Atlantic Canada. We need them to understand that the federal carbon tax is hurting people right across the country.

Interjections.

Hon. Todd Smith: Now, we know where the Liberals stand on this—they're heckling me right now—and we know their leader, Bonnie Crombie, is in full support of the federal carbon tax. So members of their caucus are in full support of this carbon tax—because they've stood up in this Legislature and said the people of Ontario are "better off" with the federal carbon tax than they would be otherwise.

It's unbelievable that the Liberals in Ontario, who drove people into energy poverty for 15 years, are letting their friends do it again in Ottawa and making life unaffordable not just for the folks in Ontario but for the folks right across this country. It's time—

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: The people in Niagara West and people across Ontario deserve to be treated fairly. The federal government must move quickly to expand this pause to all forms of home heating in Ontario, or better yet, get rid of this terrible tax altogether.

Speaker, when I speak with families and businesses in my riding, they speak about one issue consistently, and that issue is affordability. They tell me they already can't afford the impact of the carbon tax on their energy bills, and yet they're looking at a tax that's only going to rise in a few weeks.

So, our government, I know, is going to continue to ensure that we're taking action to lower energy costs, so that people can put more money in their pockets, unlike the Liberal tradition that we've seen in this House and now we see in Ottawa.

So, Speaker, could the minister explain to this House what the government is doing to ensure that families in Niagara West and every corner of this province have access to lower-emission home heating, like natural gas?

Hon. Todd Smith: Speaker, we are in the midst of an affordability crisis, not in this province but in this country, and a large portion of that is the fact that the federal government has introduced their carbon tax, a carbon tax that is expected to go up again on April Fool's Day. It's no joke, but on April 1, it's expected to go up by another 23%. Who in their right mind would add a huge tax like that while we're in the midst of an affordability crisis?

1120

I can tell you who would: It's Liberals. It's Liberals in Ontario; it's Liberals in Canada, supported by the NDP. They stand in the House from time to time and say they're on the side of the people of Ontario, but when it really matters, how do they vote? They should be picking up the phone today, calling Jagmeet, calling Justin, and saying, "Hit a pause on the carbon tax. It's only going to make life in Ontario"—

Interjections.

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

The next question.

PRESCRIPTION CONTRACEPTIVES

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: My question is to the Minister of Health. When we tabled a universal contraception motion, you deemed extending coverage to women over 25 as not resource-worthy. Yet, now, with the federal commitment, the landscape has changed.

Research underscores that universal access is pivotal for reproductive justice and economic efficiencies within health care. As we near International Women's Day, will this government back this transformative policy, championing gender equality, by endorsing universal contraception for a fairer, healthier Ontario?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As the member opposite knows, of course, Ontario has a very robust system in place with OHIP+, but I'm going to speak specifically to the federal pharmacare announcement, because, frankly, it is very, very thin on details. When I spoke to the federal minister

on Wednesday evening, I asked very specific questions, because we all need to understand how this impacts on existing programs that are happening in the province of Ontario. As the member knows, we have made some announcements specifically related to diabetes and our youth. So I want to make sure that the program that is coming in from the federal government, if it is ultimately approved and passed, is, in fact, not going to negatively impact the people of Ontario, who have a very robust system right now.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Back to the minister: Wait and see from this government means ignoring Ontario's needs. Last year we championed free contraception, highlighting what it means for so many women in Ontario—in health, in gender equality, in affordability. Despite the initial nods, the minister's wait and see turned into outright rejection.

With national pharmacare on the table, this wait-and-see stance signals a dismissal of reproductive justice for women's rights. Will this Conservative government finally prioritize Ontarians' well-being by committing to universal health care, including contraception, today?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: You know, Speaker, that question underlines exactly why the people of Ontario do not entrust their faith in the opposition. I am not and our government is not going to make decisions based on headlines leaked by Jagmeet Singh. We are going to get the details. We are going to make an assessment based on what is already existing in the province of Ontario.

I don't know if the member understands, but we have individual bilateral discussions that have to take place in order for this program to proceed, and we will do that with all of the facts and all of the details, because on this side of the House, facts matter.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Adil Shamji: For the Premier, Mr. Speaker: In Ontario, we have three branches of government: legislative, executive and judicial. The legislative branch is, of course, all of us. The executive branch includes the King, represented by the Lieutenant Governor, the Premier and the executive council. And the judicial branch is an independent system of courts that interprets and applies the law, as well as protecting the rights of citizens.

The Premier can't seem to grasp a concept that even grade 5 social studies students have mastered by the time they come here for their tours at Queen's Park. He calls his appointment of two former senior staffers to the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee "democracy," but this is a power grab and nothing more. It's the Premier tightening his grip, a shameless move that strong-arms the judicial branch for political gain and rewards friends. What else is new?

Without quintupling down, will the Premier tell us the real reason that he thinks two former staffers are more

qualified to choose our judges than non-partisan legal experts?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: You know, that is the quintessential Liberal arrogance—condescension, telling us how the system works—

Mrs. Robin Martin: Mansplaining.

Hon. Doug Downey: Yes, it is mansplaining. Thank you.

Look, the way that it works is that people vote for who they want to have govern, and that's what they did. That's why our government is sitting here and they are sitting there. They want us to put people in positions to make decisions to keep their communities safe, to make sure that we are representing their interests, to make sure that we are making good and solid decisions.

They would have us go to one of their ideologues to sit and give us advice. I know this for a fact and I will address it in the second answer.

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

Mr. Adil Shamji: As we just heard, this is about controlling people in high places. We saw it with the former staffer who was charged with orchestrating the historic greenbelt giveaway. Now we have a registered gun lobbyist, friendly to the Premier, in charge of selecting our judges amidst a wave of gun violence. Life really is stranger than fiction.

The judicial branch administers justice by applying our laws, not by bending them to a political party's will, because anyone could find themselves in criminal court someday, even the Premier. Wouldn't he want to know that those judges were chosen for their fairness and not their political leanings? I'm just saying.

It sure pays to be a friend of the Premier. Whether you're a developer drooling over the greenbelt, a private company like Staples, Shoppers Drug Mart or Loblaws, a buddy in need of an MZO, a compadre connected to for-profit health care, the Premier always has a friend in mind.

Will the Premier ever stop working for his friends and start working for Ontarians?

Hon. Doug Downey: Here's what happens: The government of the day, whoever the government happens to be, has some appointments to a committee that also has judges appointed that are appointed by others. They receive applications and they go through the applications and they make recommendations to the Attorney General, who then makes recommendations to cabinet. That's how it works.

And once the person is appointed, then they get their judicial independence. If we want a full civics lesson, judicial independence starts at the moment of appointment, not at the selection process. So I'll take no lessons from the Liberals, who had donors on the committee for decades and appointed—40% of the 47 judges appointed in 2017 were donors to the Liberals and the NDP.

TAXATION

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. The carbon tax is punishing the hard-working individuals, businesses and farmers who produce quality food for families across Ontario.

Since its introduction, production costs for farmers, greenhouse growers and food processors have increased significantly. The delivery of every single consumer good in our province, particularly fresh and processed food, is being impacted by this punitive tax. It is driving up the cost of transporting inputs like seed, fertilizer and packaging to the cost of transporting fruits and vegetables to market.

Can the minister please explain what impact this harmful and regressive tax is having on our agricultural sector?

1130

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much to the member for Newmarket–Aurora for that question. It shows she’s caring. The member from Newmarket–Aurora is absolutely spot-on. It shows she’s connected and she cares about what’s happening in her riding.

Speaker, in short, the Liberal carbon tax is eroding the Ontario farmers’ and food industry’s ability to compete at a global level because of the regressive carbon tax that’s causing the cost of production to go sky high.

Speaker, I was speaking to a farmer who grows fresh produce—peppers—and his carbon tax on his monthly energy bill is 30%; 30% of his energy bill goes to the carbon tax.

I spoke to a grain company in my riding of Huron–Bruce. For the month of November—wait for this, Speaker—his costs were almost \$200,000. The carbon tax costs that one business—

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

Supplementary question?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the minister for that response. It is clear that the federal carbon tax is hurting farmers in our province. Many of them are being forced to pay thousands of dollars more in natural gas bills. Speaker, Ontario’s hard-working farmers deserve better.

Unlike the opposition NDP and independent Liberals, our government recognizes the adverse effects this harmful tax is having on communities across Ontario. We need all members of the Legislature to join us and call on the federal government to end this tax.

Speaker, can the minister please explain what impact the carbon tax is having on so many farmers and families in our province?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Rural Ontario is home to 2.5 million people and economists are saying, as the carbon price rises, so will the cost of food—and ladies and gentlemen, not only the cost of food but the cost of energy.

The fact of the matter is, on our farm, in our house specifically, the carbon tax has caused our home heating bill to go up 17%.

And furthermore, the Minister of Energy said, on April 1, it goes up again. Well, get this: As of April 1, home heating is going to go up 15 cents per metric tonne of heat. I’m going to repeat that so I get my numbers right: As of April 1, there’s going to be an additional 15 cents per cubic metre for natural gas, and the gas at the fuel pump is going up 17 cents per litre. That’s going to affect all of Ontario.

I dare that member opposite from the NDP who said, “Get over it,” come out to a farm—

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

The next question.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Minister of Health. Northerners often have to travel to get access to a specialist; we get that. There are lots of big hospitals down here; we get that. To make health care equitable, something called the Northern Health Travel Grant exists.

So we often have to travel hours, and we get reimbursed for a hotel room if we have to travel too far. The reimbursement is \$100 per night. I would ask the Minister of Health, could she or any of her colleagues give me a list of hotels around here where you can rent a room for \$100 per night.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The member opposite knows that the Northern Health Travel Grant is part of a suite of programs that we ensure people have access to health care when they need, in particular, specialists.

But we are also building additional primary care in northern Ontario, in eastern Ontario, in southwestern Ontario and in the Niagara region. We want to make sure that people have that access.

The other piece that we are working on to ensure that the primary care piece is absolutely critical is making sure that we are expanding programs like the Ornge air ambulance. Not only are we replacing our fixed-wing fleet, but we are adding an additional four. Why? Because we want to make sure the people in northern Ontario and in southern Ontario have access.

Another piece that the member, of course, would be familiar with is an expansion in our MRI programs, ensuring that hospitals that have never had an MRI finally have that program in their facility so that they—

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

Supplementary question?

Mr. John Vanthof: In the minister’s own words, facts matter. The fact is, it’s impossible to rent a hotel room anywhere close to a major hospital for \$100 a night. So right off the bat, northerners don’t have equal access. Furthermore, the travel costs which are subsidized by the grant come nowhere close to what the actual costs are. Yet this government refuses to change the Northern Health Travel Grant.

My question is, why? Why don’t northerners deserve equitable access to specialists in the province?

Interjections.

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

The Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: In fact, we have made some changes to the northern travel grant. One, of course, is making it easier for people to receive those remunerations and expenses covered by allowing online access.

There's more to do; we absolutely acknowledge that. But would the member opposite also agree that expanding access to primary care, expanding access to MRIs, expanding access to CT scanners in community is an important piece to ensure that people do not have to do the travelling that historically they have had to do because previous governments did not make those investments in community?

TAXATION

Mr. Trevor Jones: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. The federal carbon tax is not working to reduce emissions. Instead, it's driving up the costs of goods, services and essential items for the people of Ontario. In the natural resources sector, the federally imposed carbon tax has an impact on the cost of products such as sand, stone, lumber and other building materials. Not only does it make raw materials more expensive, but it also affects the entire supply chain, resulting in higher costs for everyone and everything. Speaker, can the minister please explain how the carbon tax is negatively impacting industries in the natural resources sector and consumers across Ontario?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Thanks to the member from Chatham-Kent-Leamington for the question. I've had the opportunity to speak about this before, but let's focus on the aggregate sector today. Let's focus on every load of gravel that is needed to build Ontario, to build hospitals, to build schools, to build communities. We absolutely have to have that aggregate. Every load that comes out of every pit and every quarry is subjected to carbon tax. It's driving up the cost.

Here's a quote from Ontario Stone, Sand and Gravel Association: "Politicians can't have it both ways. If they support affordable housing ... they must support sand and gravel. If they "support new schools, hospitals and roads ... they need to support sand and gravel."

Speaker, we urge the federal government to end this tax. Another doomsday is coming on April 1, and it's going to make everything more expensive. We ask the members opposite: Do the same. It's easy. Do the same. Make the ask. Do what's right for Ontarians so we can build Ontario.

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

Mr. Trevor Jones: Thank you to the minister for that response. Aggregate businesses like Erie Sand and Gravel in Leamington are adversely impacted by the federal carbon tax. I hear it. I see it. The carbon tax has contributed to higher fuel prices and higher shipping prices. Industries in the natural resources sector are vital to sustaining and contributing to Ontario's economic prosperity. They need our support now. While the independent Liberal and

opposition NDP members continue to support this punishing tax, our government will keep working to make life more affordable for everyone.

Speaker, can the minister please expand on how the carbon tax is negatively impacting local businesses around our province?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Again, thank you to my colleague for the question. Our government is supporting job creators in building a stronger Ontario every day, but those job creators need help to do that. They need the independent Liberals and all the independents and all the opposition to pick up the phone, call Ottawa and say, "This carbon tax does not work for Ontario." The job creators want us to continue to advocate for Ontarians. They want us to make sure that the message is clear: that if we want to build Ontario, the things that we need to do it with are subject to carbon tax, and the price is getting driven up every day.

1140

Again, I'll quote my friends at OSSGA: "Aggregate is a clean industry. The most significant long-term environmental impact of aggregate extraction is trucking. That's why aggregate must be located as close to where it's needed as possible."

Mr. Speaker, we want to build Ontario. We can't do it with a carbon tax on our back that's wrestling us to the ground every—

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

The next question.

HEALTH CARE

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: My question is to the Premier. After question period this morning, the government can vote for the gender-affirming health care act. They can choose to take action. They can choose to save lives.

I've never spoken to a single trans Ontarian who believes that Ontario's system for delivering gender-affirming health care is actually working. But during the debate on Thursday, members of this government gave indication that they would not be supporting the bill. I hope members of this government all know that by voting against this bill, it means that they're voting against members in their own community; it means that they're voting against constituents. They're probably even voting against members of their own family.

Trans and gender-diverse constituents who are struggling to access health care in Ontario need to be treated with the same level of respect as every other Ontarian.

Will this government state on the public record whether or not they believe that gender-affirming health care is life-saving health care? Yes or no?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, there's no doubt that all Ontarians deserve and need to be able to have confidence in their health care system, which is why we believe that

the expansion of family health teams—including specific teams that have programs as part of their LGBTQ+ services and offer specific clinics for trans populations which provide interdisciplinary primary care services.

We're talking about the member opposite forming a committee. We're actually investing in communities. We're investing in those primary care teams that are providing the services on the ground. That is critically important to our government, to make sure that all individuals in Ontario, regardless of how they identify, get the health care they deserve in the province of Ontario.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I'm disappointed by the minister's answer, but I am not surprised.

By refusing to acknowledge that gender-affirming health care is life-saving health care, this government is sending a very clear message to trans Ontarians: They don't matter. They don't count. Their lives are not important.

Advocates have been asking for years to expand OHIP coverage to reduce the barriers to accessing gender-affirming care and to make sure that Ontarians don't have to leave the province to get the life-saving care that they need and deserve.

Too many people in this province are clearly paying out of pocket, and they're waiting for years to address gender-affirming care. A message that they need to deliver to this government is that they need to be seen, heard and respected when they go see a health care professional, and that is not happening right now.

We need to ensure that everyone in Ontario can access health care that's free of discrimination and can have equal treatment.

Speaker, my question to the Premier, to the Minister of Health is that—during the last term, they voted for gender-affirming health care. This is now the same bill. Why has this government reversed course? Why are they not supporting trans rights and their right to gender-affirming health care?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The member opposite is talking about forming a committee. We are talking about real action that is making an impact in communities across Ontario.

Is the member opposite suggesting that the expansion of community health centres, of family health teams that provide specific services to the LGBTQ+ community is not an appropriate investment?

I don't want to keep talking about it. I want to act. And that's what our government is doing.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

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

Mr. John Fraser: Point of order, Mr. Speaker: This morning, in questions and responses, when I was asking the Attorney General whether he thought it was appropriate for him to be criticizing the appointment of two judges,

I misnamed those judges. The names of those judges are Lise Maisonneuve and Faith Finnestad.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Don Valley North.

Mr. Vincent Ke: I'd like to welcome page Isaac Luo and his parents, Zhibin Luo and Jieyi Feng, from my riding of Don Valley North. I believe today is Isaac's page captain day.

I'd also like to welcome the talented Sofia Van Weerdenburg and George Lu from my riding, too, who are participating in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario arts program.

Enjoy your time at Queen's Park.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Beaches—East York on a point of order.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to wish my terrific colleague from Kingston and the Islands—and I'm sure you will all join me—a happiest birthday ever, spending it with you.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Guelph has given notice of their dissatisfaction with the answer to their question given by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing regarding legalizing fourplexes. This matter will be debated tomorrow following private members' public business.

DEFERRED VOTES

GENDER AFFIRMING HEALTH CARE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ACT, 2024 LOI DE 2024 SUR LE COMITÉ CONSULTATIF DES SOINS DE SANTÉ AXÉS SUR L'AFFIRMATION DE GENRE

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

Bill 42, An Act to establish the Gender Affirming Health Care Advisory Committee / Projet de loi 42, Loi créant le Comité consultatif des soins de santé axés sur l'affirmation de genre.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1146 to 1151.

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

On February 29, 2024, MPP Wong-Tam moved second reading of Bill 42, An Act to establish the Gender Affirming Health Care Advisory Committee.

All those in favour will please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gretzky, Lisa	Shamji, Adil
Bell, Jessica	Harden, Joel	Shaw, Sandy
Blais, Stephen	Hazell, Andrea	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Bowman, Stephanie	Hsu, Ted	Stiles, Marit
Burch, Jeff	Karpoche, Bhutla	Tabuns, Peter
Clancy, Aislinn	Kernaghan, Terence	Taylor, Monique
Fife, Catherine	McCrimmon, Karen	Vanthof, John
Fraser, John	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Vaugeois, Lise
French, Jennifer K.	Pasma, Chandra	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
Gates, Wayne	Sattler, Peggy	
Glover, Chris	Schreiner, Mike	

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Anand, Deepak	Ghamari, Goldie	Rae, Matthew
Babikian, Aris	Hardeman, Ernie	Riddell, Brian
Bailey, Robert	Harris, Mike	Romano, Ross
Barnes, Patrice	Hogarth, Christine	Sabawy, Sheref
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Holland, Kevin	Sandhu, Amarjot
Bouma, Will	Jones, Sylvia	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Jones, Trevor	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Byers, Rick	Jordan, John	Saunderson, Brian
Calandra, Paul	Kanapathi, Logan	Scott, Laurie
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Ke, Vincent	Skelly, Donna
Cho, Stan	Kerzner, Michael S.	Smith, Dave
Clark, Steve	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, David
Coe, Lorne	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Graydon
Crawford, Stephen	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, Todd
Cuzzetto, Rudy	MacLeod, Lisa	Surma, Kinga
Dixon, Jess	Martin, Robin	Tangri, Nina
Dowie, Andrew	McCarthy, Todd J.	Thompson, Lisa M.
Downey, Doug	Oosterhoff, Sam	Tibollo, Michael A.
Dunlop, Jill	Pang, Billy	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Flack, Rob	Parsa, Michael	Wai, Daisy
Ford, Michael D.	Pierre, Natalie	Williams, Charmaine A.
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Quinn, Nolan	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 31; the nays are 65

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

Second reading negatived.

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

The House recessed from 1155 to 1300.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CULTURAL POLICY

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 66(c), the 2023-24 supplementary estimates of the Ministry of Education, before the Standing Committee on Social Policy, and of the Ministry of Transportation, before the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy, are deemed to be passed by the committees and are deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

Reports deemed received.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

THE SIX BREWING COMPANY INC. ACT, 2024

Ms. Hogarth moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr38, An Act to revive The Six Brewing Company Inc.

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

First reading agreed to.

PETITIONS

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a petition entitled “Stand Up For Local Conservation Authorities.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ford government’s devastating changes to the Conservation Authorities Act and Bill 23 create substantial risk to people, properties and the environment; and

“Whereas these changes allow developers to dig, build, and excavate without oversight from conservation authorities; and

“Whereas Ford’s government would allow the sale of conservation lands—including endangered or threatened species habitat, wetlands, and areas of natural and scientific interest; and

“Whereas these changes will increase risks of flood, fires, and droughts in our province;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reverse the reckless and harmful changes so conservation authorities can properly protect Ontario’s watersheds and wetlands.”

I fully support this petition, even though I struggled to read it, and I’m going to give it Matias to take to the table.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Ms. Christine Hogarth: This petition is titled “Encouraging Passage of Bill 121, the Improving Dementia Care in Ontario Act, 2023.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Alzheimer’s disease affects over 250,000 people in the province of Ontario;

“Whereas it is estimated that approximately 400,000 individuals will be diagnosed with dementia by 2030;

“Whereas by the year 2050, more than 1.7 million Canadians are expected to be living with dementia, with an average of 685 individuals diagnosed each day;

“Whereas Alzheimer’s disease is not a normal part of aging and is irreversible;

“Whereas 69% of LTC residents are living with dementia;

“Whereas 45% of care partners providing care to people living with dementia exhibit symptoms of distress. This is almost twice the rate compared to care partners of older adults with health conditions other than dementia, which is only 26%;

“Whereas caregivers of those living with dementia decrease their participation in the economy;

“Whereas upstream investments in dementia, prevention, and care are needed to reduce the strain on capacity and resources;

“Whereas strategies to mitigate stigma and combat ageism should be at the heart of the strategy;

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

“To urge all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to build on the progress this government has made on building a patient-centred home and community care system.”

This is an excellent petition, and I was pleased to sign my name to it. I’ll give it to Ellen to bring to the front.

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: This petition is labelled as “Stop Ford’s Health Care Privatization Plan.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontarians should get health care based on need—not the size of your wallet;

“Whereas Premier Doug Ford and Health Minister Sylvia Jones say they’re planning to privatize parts of health care;

“Whereas privatization will bleed nurses, doctors and PSWs out of our public hospitals, making the health care crisis worse;

“Whereas privatization always ends with patients getting a bill;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately stop all plans to further privatize Ontario’s health care system, and fix the crisis in health care by:

“—recruiting, retaining and respecting doctors, nurses and PSWs with better pay and better working conditions;

“—licensing tens of thousands of internationally educated nurses and other health care professionals already in Ontario, who wait years and pay thousands to have their credentials certified;

“—making education and training free or low-cost for nurses, doctors and other health care professionals;

“—incentivizing doctors and nurses to choose to live and work in northern Ontario;

“—funding hospitals to have enough nurses on every shift, on every ward.”

I fully support this, and I’ll be affixing my name, sending it to the table with page Mercy.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I’m going to take a moment to remind members that there’s no requirement to read the entire petition verbatim, if you wish to abbreviate it.

Secondly, we don’t refer to each other in the House by our personal surnames. We refer to each other by our riding name or ministerial title, as applicable, and so I would encourage members to consider doing that when there’s a name of another member in a petition.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I would like to thank Lorna Mills, who lives in Fox Hollow senior apartments in London West, for collecting signatures from almost every single one of the residents of that 48-unit apartment, to sign a petition entitled “Bring Back Real Rent Control.” It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government cancelled rent control on units built after November 2018; and

“Whereas the cost to rent a home has never been higher; and

“Whereas people are being forced to leave their communities because decent, affordable homes are increasingly out of reach; and

“Whereas the Rent Control for All Tenants Act, 2022, will ensure tenants are not gouged on rent each year;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to protect tenants from predatory rent increases and pass the Rent Control for All Tenants Act to ensure renters can live in safe and affordable homes.”

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

TUITION

Ms. Catherine Fife: This petition is called “Fight the Fees.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas since 1980, whilst accounting for inflation, the average domestic undergraduate tuition has increased by 215%, and the average domestic graduate tuition by 247%; and

“Whereas upon graduation, 50% of students will have a median debt of around \$17,500, which takes an average of 9.5 years to repay; and

“Whereas the average undergraduate tuition for international students has increased by 192% between 2011 and 2021...; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario made changes to OSAP and student financial assistance in” the “2018-19” budget, “resulting in over a \$1-billion cut in assistance to students; and

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“Whereas the so-called Student Choice Initiative was defeated in the courts, students need legislation to protect their right to organize and funding for students’ groups;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario’s call and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to commit to (1) free and accessible education for all, (2) grants, not loans, and (3) legislate students’ right to organize.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature and give it to page Mesapé.

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

TUITION

Mr. Jeff Burch: This is a petition from the Canadian Federation of Students.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas since 1980, whilst accounting for inflation, the average domestic undergraduate tuition has increased

by 215%, and the average domestic graduate tuition by 247%; and

“Whereas upon graduation, 50% of students will have a median debt of around \$17,500, which takes an average of 9.5 years to repay; and

“Whereas the average undergraduate tuition for international students has increased by 192% between 2011 and 2021, and in colleges, they pay an average of \$14,306 annually compared to the average domestic fee of \$3,228; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario made changes to OSAP and student financial assistance in 2018-19, resulting in over a \$1-billion cut in assistance to students; and

“Whereas the so-called Student Choice Initiative was defeated in the courts, students need legislation to protect their right to organize and funding for students’ groups;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario’s call and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to commit to (1) free and accessible education for all, (2) grants, not loans, and (3) legislate students’ right to organize.”

I will add my signature to the petition.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition to raise social assistance rates. Once again, I would like to thank Dr. Sally Palmer for not giving up and continuing to send these petitions in.

“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 wholeheartedly support this petition. I will affix my name to it and give it to page Sarah to bring to the Clerk.

AMYLOIDOSIS

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Speaker, I have a petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas amyloidosis is an incurable disease that affects Ontario residents and their loved ones;

“Whereas amyloidosis, including hereditary and non-hereditary forms of the disease, is caused by abnormal proteins, known as amyloids, that build up in the tissues and/or organs of the body and can cause organ failure and can be fatal;

“Whereas recognition of this disease is critical in order to ensure that more Ontarians are diagnosed earlier. Earlier diagnoses can ensure patients receive treatments in a timely manner and can contribute to a more positive outcome, better quality of life and longer quality of life. In addition, these benefits can reduce the burden on society in general;

“Whereas both national and local support groups for patients are working to ensure that more treatment options are available to patients in this province, that more publicly funded drugs are available to fight this disease in Ontario, and that adequate care is accessible to all Ontarians no matter where they live;

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

“To recognize March 2024 as Amyloidosis Awareness Month to raise awareness of this disease among our fellow Ontarians and to improve outcomes for both patients and their families and for newly diagnosed and as-yet-undiagnosed patients.”

I want to thank Jennifer Enright for this petition, and I’m going to sign it and pass it to Seyona to take to the table.

OPPOSITION DAY

HIGHWAY TOLLS

Ms. Marit Stiles: I move the following motion:

Whereas Highway 407 is underutilized because it has some of the highest tolls in North America; and

Whereas eliminating tolls for transport trucks on Highway 407 would remove as many as 21,000 trucks per day from Highway 401 and other highways; and

Whereas diverting transport trucks from Highway 401 and other highways would significantly reduce traffic, reduce emissions, and improve safety; and

Whereas eliminating tolls for transport trucks on Highway 407 would improve Ontario’s supply chain for food and other goods; and

Whereas the government has forgiven a billion dollars in penalties for the 407 ETR which should have been used to lower tolls for Ontarians;

Therefore, the Legislative Assembly calls on the government to remove tolls for transport trucks on Highway 407.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Ms. Stiles has moved opposition day 1.

I return to the member.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, since the Legislature’s last sitting, little has changed for the people of this province. Life continues to be deeply unaffordable. And while the Premier and his government like to make tall claims about how they are making life better for people, the truth is that people are still struggling with the high cost of living, and they’re making some very tough choices every single day just to get by.

The official opposition came back to the first session this year with a firm resolve to address the stress facing the hard-working people of this province. We are laser-focused on presenting solutions that will make life easier and more affordable. Since returning, we’ve asked the government whether they will support the federal government’s pharmacare plan and help people get free access to essential medication—something, of course, that the federal NDP has fought so hard for. We’ve urged the government to increase funding to primary care clinics where, in some places, thousands—even tens of thousands—of people are at risk of losing access to their family doctor and care. We’ve demanded the government move on affordable housing.

So much needs to get done, but this government just doesn’t seem to care. They are too wrapped up in never-ending scandals and making shifty backroom deals with insiders.

Speaker, as you know, my role takes me on the road quite often, meeting people from lots of different backgrounds and different experiences, different jobs in different parts of the province. And every one I meet mentions that the cost of living is really—well, it’s almost always the very first issue that they raise with me.

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I was in Brampton on Friday, just a couple of days ago. We know, of course, that the trucking and logistics industry is a real pillar of Brampton’s economy. In fact, according to Brampton’s economic development office, this sector contributes roughly \$2 billion to Canada’s GDP yearly. That’s not insignificant.

Not only is the trucking industry so vital to Ontario and to Canada’s economy, but it also literally keeps the wheels running. It means that our province and our country is able to move goods around. It’s absolutely critical. From farmers’ fields and barns to the grocery store and to your family table—it’s truckers who get it there.

According to the Brampton Pointer, the trucking industry is the reason so many businesses were able to keep their doors open during the disruptions that were caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Right now, unfortunately, this government is shortchanging the very people who make this industry go: the truck drivers. Frankly, they’re shortchanging regular commuters too.

I wish I could say that this was a surprise, but it’s absolutely on brand for a government that has routinely put the interests of a very few special people—often, at certain weddings, making backroom deals—ahead of, well, just about everything else.

The government's attempt to carve up the greenbelt and sell it to the highest bidder in some shady backroom deals has resulted in an RCMP criminal investigation of this government.

The Conservatives have shown over and over again their willingness to help those who help their party. It comes at the major expense of most hard-working people in this province. Nearly every major policy in the last year or more, at least since the last election, in 2022, has been reversed because this government was caught out or forced to back down.

Meanwhile, people in Ontario keep working, but their life under this government has neither gotten easier nor more affordable.

It's not only truckers, I want to be very clear, who are stuck in traffic, of course. These are people with families and loved ones. Certainly, the truck drivers spend long, gruelling hours on the road—sometimes 12 to 15 hours behind the wheel. Let's think about that for a minute: 12 to 15 hours behind the wheel. We all know what it's like being stuck in traffic. When you're bumper to bumper for hours like that—think about the frustration and stress that must cause.

What the official opposition is presenting today is a straightforward solution that would make life better for people right now. That solution is removing the high tolls that truckers are forced to pay on the privately owned Highway 407. Truckers on Highway 407 are stuck paying some of the highest tolls in North America. Removing this toll is not only going to save them money, but it's also going to reduce travel time by up to 80 minutes. It's a common-sense solution, dare I say, and it's going to help make life convenient for so many people. It's going to move truckers off of the overused and over-congested 401, cutting commute times for everybody who uses that highway. For truckers and for commuters, it means getting to your destination faster, getting home faster, giving you more time to spend with your family, your loved ones and, frankly, more time to rest.

This government has a chance right now, right here in front of them, to make life cheaper and easier for people in Ontario—not 10 years from now, but right now.

Our solution is also a win for the province. It means improved freight movement, diverting truck traffic and reducing congestion on the 401.

A report that was commissioned by Environmental Defence also found that moving truckers and trucks from Highway 401 to the 407 is going to alleviate congestion for all road users and reduce journey times for truck drivers.

There is strong evidence for removing tolls for truckers on the 407. We are giving the government an opportunity here to stand up for hard-working people over wealthy private corporations.

Speaker, even though it's not really included in this particular motion, I want to point out that there has been widespread demand for 407 toll exemptions from other quarters as well. I do want to mention this, because the government could take this and run with it.

The minister and the Premier have received a letter from Grand Council Chief Reginald Niganobe of Anishinabek Nation asking for a 407 ETR toll exemption. They've been fighting for years, because this runs right through their territory. Let me read from that letter for a minute.

"The Highway 407 expansion project is one of the largest construction projects ever to take place in Ontario. This highway runs through First Nation treaty and traditional territories; however, First Nations were not consulted prior to its development.

"The Anishinabek Nation is seeking a toll exemption for all First Nation citizens when travelling on Highway 407 in addition to having meaningful discussion on revenue and benefits sharing. Great potential for opportunity exists that can be beneficial to the provincial economy and Ontario overall. The Anishinabek Nation has extended the offer to discuss these opportunities since 2012"—since 2012.

When is the government actually going to respond to that? When will the government look up from serving the needs of their insider friends and corporate interests and start actually serving the people of this province?

In 2021, the government had this opportunity. They had an opportunity to choose hard-working people over corporate interests with regard to Highway 407, and again, they chose to side with the latter. That year, the government chose not to collect over \$1 billion worth of congestion penalties owed by the private 407 ETR. The government could have used these penalties as leverage to negotiate the removal or reduction of tolls for truckers, but true to their brand, they said no—no to making life more convenient for people, no to making life more affordable for people.

The Liberals, before them, didn't do anything to stop ruthless billing practices by the 407 ETR either. The operator let unpaid bill notices pile up for years, accruing interest without the driver's knowledge, and then they demanded that the government suspend the driver's licence if they didn't pay.

I want to remind people, in 2014, the 407 ETR sent a woman a bill of more than \$6,000 for an unpaid toll charge from 14 years earlier—originally, it had just been \$200, but now it included thousands of dollars in interest.

Recently, I want to add, the government tabled a bill that is a perfect example of an action that this government takes, like so many of them, that pretends to be about saving people money but ends up being just another symbolic gesture that's not going to do anything to change the status quo. I think we all know which one I'm talking about. That bill prohibits tolls on highways that—wait for it—don't even have tolls. And guess what? They're actually maintaining the tolls on Highway 407, the one highway that does actually have these excruciatingly high tolls and is deeply underutilized.

In contrast, I want to point out that the official opposition NDP fought for and won the removal of tolls on Highways 412 and 418. I want to credit my colleague the MPP for Oshawa—

Interjections.

Ms. Marit Stiles: —yes—for her absolutely tireless work for her community and all the commuters in the Durham region.

We on this side of the House are putting forward ideas that would make a difference now, not years from now. Instead of banning fictional tolls that just don't exist, our motion calls for them to be removed where they do exist, here, right now, in reality.

The government's so-called Get It Done Act is a prime example of how they boast about doing a lot but don't actually get anything done. The bill should really be called the "get nothing done act" instead. Since they were elected five years ago, they have done nothing on housing or health care, nothing on the cost of living. All they've done is bring back this sketchy cash-for-access culture where companies, speculators and the personal friends of the Premier get richer and richer at the expense of hard-working people in this province.

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Highway 407 was a bad deal to begin with, and now Ontarians are the ones who are stuck footing the bill. Even the Premier himself is on record, back in 2022, saying this deal was a mistake. So why doesn't he do something about it now to fix it? At that time, I remember there was an editorial that criticized the deal as bad for motorists. Everybody was worried we were going to be squeezed by the new owners—and that was back when this deal was first signed. It was a Toronto Star editorial, and it said, "Why single out people for punishment just because they live in a particular area or travel on a particular road?" The paper also said, "Strip away all the ideology about private sector superiority and what you're left with is not all that different from the government selling someone the right to hold people to ransom."

I want to also read from an article that Jamie Bradburn wrote for TVO, because I think it's important for us to remember how this all started if we want to talk about how we actually make change to it:

"The deal closed on May 5, coinciding with the government's pre-election budget and heightening suspicions that the sale had been made to shore up Tory support for the election."

What a surprise. See, it sounds eerily familiar.

Meanwhile, even back then, the NDP said that the Highway 407 windfall should be used to cover things like the TTC hikes.

Speaker, like I said, we on this side of the House have a long-standing record of standing up for the hard-working people of this province over and over and over again.

We are presenting the government with a chance to fix this mess, save money, save time, ease congestion. Highway 407 is underutilized. Anybody who goes there knows it. We all see it. The 401, on the other hand, is overused, so congested.

This morning, I asked if the government would stand up for Ontarians and remove tolls on the 407 for truckers, and I have to say, I was really disappointed that they didn't just say immediately, "Yes, you're darn right we will. We

are going to reverse that policy. We're going to get in there and we're going to fight for Ontarians." Like I said at the start of my comments, the plan here would be to actually move truckers from the 401 to the 407, and the impact of that is to ease the congestion on everyone so that all the people who are using the 401 also get to their destination faster. That could mean getting to work faster, getting home in time to pick your kid up from school or from daycare, if you're lucky enough to find a space these days—but giving yourself that opportunity.

As a working parent, I didn't have to take the 401 every day, but I remember the stress and anxiety of trying to race for home—that you finish work maybe at 5, 5:30, and you've got to get back to the daycare in time to pick up your kids at 6 o'clock or you get fined. Others have been there. You know what I'm talking about. Now that my kids are adults, I think all the time about the stress on our lives of that race every day. I think about how it must feel.

My husband was always on the 401 at that time, actually. He was working closer to the 401, so he had to take the 401, and I know how stressful it was for him every day.

People deserve to get home earlier to have time to relax and rest and be with their loved ones.

If this government actually cares about making life more convenient and more affordable for the people of this province, they're going to vote yes to this motion.

I was asked a little earlier by some in the media whether or not this is even possible—can you open up that contract? And I would say, why not? The government has certainly opened up other contracts. They haven't hesitated there—torn them up left, right and centre, gone to court, wasted probably millions of dollars on it. Instead of, actually, an opportunity like this, where—I have to say, I skipped over some of it, but there are so many quotes from previous Conservatives in opposition etc. critiquing the deal. This is a bad deal. It always was a bad deal.

When I'm out across the province, and particularly when I'm in a region where people are actually using the 401 a lot, there are a lot of people who are saying, "I don't really care whether this big company is going to make more money." Do you know what? They have a billion dollars of what was actually owed, fines that were owed to the people of Ontario—because the 407 has been so underutilized that they actually owe us, the people of Ontario—and the government has just looked the other way. I come out of a background of negotiating big collective agreements with big multinational corporations, motion picture studios. That's my background. I think to myself, "You've got a billion dollars in leverage. Surely you're going to get something for that. If you're not going to get that billion dollars back, you should be getting something pretty fricking fantastic for the people of Ontario—a billion dollars, and you're just going to look the other way?" No, no. It is also time that corporations like that started being part of the solution to people's problems, started actually paying their fair share, started helping out. It is unacceptable that they should be able to

waive a billion-dollar fine that is owed to the people of Ontario without getting something good back.

I was also asked by the media: “Why is this timely? Why does it matter right now?”

As I pointed out earlier, a lot of people are struggling right now. I hear it all the time.

I was in Brampton this weekend, and every time I’m in that region, I hear a lot from people in the trucking industry and logistics about the pressure they’re under, like so many other businesses, especially small businesses in our province—the stress, the anxiety, the pressure, the competition. A lot of them are really just on the edge of folding, and I think this would go a long way in helping them out. So it really is a win-win: We help out those workers and that industry, we move things faster, and we also move some of that congestion off the 401. It’s such an obvious solution. I think what’s surprising is just that the government isn’t immediately standing up and saying, “Yes, we’re doing it. Let’s go. Let’s work together.”

Speaker, that’s what we on this side of the House want to do. We want to start finding solutions that work for people. We’re not interested in insider deals or whether some big corporation that donates a lot of money to us is going to make more profits this year. We want to see the people of this province be able to spend more time with their families, get the care they need, spend a little bit more time in their communities, and we want to see things turn around. When we’re in government in 2026, we’re going to do all that.

We’re just asking the government—let’s not wait. Let’s move it forward. Let’s get something done. Let’s make life more affordable for the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I genuinely feel that this debate today is truly a case of a “help us help you” sort of a situation. There are important lessons to be learned from the 407 contract that the former Harris government signed, and it’s interesting to see how the government of the day interacts with the 407 and their executives and their staff.

I’m going to be quoting heavily from an FOI document. I want to thank the Toronto Star and Paul Webster, in particular, who was able to unpack some of those negotiations, because I think that it puts our motion today in context, and that puts the people of this province at the centre of those contractual negotiations, and it definitely is a choice that this government has today.

Just to remind folks, we are debating the removing of tolls on the 407 for trucks. I want to say there are obviously some tangible things in this proposal, this opposition motion to the government. It would include moving trucks to the 407 and would move 12,000 to 21,000 trucks a day off of Highway 401, reducing daily traffic for passenger vehicles. This is really good. Moving trucks to the 407 will improve journey times for truckers by approximately 80 minutes, which would be less than half the length of time or the equivalent on Highway 401. This is a game-changer for moving goods and services across this province, saving truckers money, saving those companies money, saving

consumers money because it reduces the cost of moving those goods and services.

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Subsidizing the 407 will cost \$6 billion less than constructing the proposed Highway 413, which our leader has quite rightfully pointed out will not be in action for another decade. This is something that can be done today. This is something that is a creative option for this government to recognize the cost-of-living challenges that folks are facing in Ontario.

You have to go back to that time in this place—there were only a few of us allowed at the time, but I do remember this debate very clearly—when we found out that the government of Ontario had forgiven the 407, as a corporation, \$1 billion. It was quite shocking because, remember, the context and the history of this moment is that there was a health human crisis in the province of Ontario. People were on the edge of bankruptcy—if you were a small business. We had the most closures of classrooms across the country. Ontario holds that record. Then we found out that in all of this crisis and all of these historic changes that were going on in the province of Ontario, this little deal was happening between the Minister of Transportation and the 407.

When you pull back that curtain or you get into that backroom, you find out, really, what happened. We all know that the 407 does have contractual targets. This is part of the legal agreement between the province and the 407. We saw, though, through internal documents obtained, that this revealed months of negotiations between ministry officials and the private operator, ending with the government not seeking compensation. This was a choice that this government—nor is there evidence that the government requested tolls or any affordability measures.

I’m going to say why this is so important: The 407 as a corporation, as a corporate entity, realized as soon as there was a lockdown here in the province of Ontario that they were not going to have the prerequisite travellers on the 407. They knew that they could change course here. They could reduce their own tolls to improve ridership on the 407, but they said no: “We’ve got this contract and we’ve got this particular government, which is very sympathetic to corporations”—all of this during the COVID crisis in Ontario. It does speak to the priorities of this government, I will say.

In the end, what this government did, under the leadership of Premier Ford, is essentially give a COVID-related rebate to the 407. That was a choice that was made. But according to the documents obtained through provincial freedom-of-information requests, this government knowingly did not pursue “‘potential congestion penalty payments in the order of \$1 billion’ for 2020 and could decide not to do so again” the next year.

Remember, even in 2020, the 407 had a profit of \$161 million. They were still a profitable company. Do you know who wasn’t profitable during that time? Restaurants, theatre and the arts, the creative economy. This all happened in the context of Bill 124, when this government

said, “No, we can’t afford to pay nurses what they’re due.” Bill 124—unconstitutional. We knew it at the time. Now it has been confirmed, and once again this government has had to walk it back. Imagine that. You have a profitable company in the 407, they have a get-out-of-jail clause built into their contract, but the government of the day chose not to put any pressure whatsoever on this corporation to acknowledge that people around the province were hurting.

Now this all comes in the context of Highway 413—no business case for this highway; no transparency on the financials of this particular highway. It was not in the 10-year transportation strategy for the province of Ontario, which means Highway 413 bumps down every local transportation project that’s in our own ridings, at a cost of potentially between \$6 billion and \$10 billion, but there’s no transparency on that full cost.

And so, even though in 2020 the 407 ETR posted a \$147.1-million profit, the minister at the time decided that they were not going to put any pressure on the 407 to follow through. The correspondence back and forth between the Ministry of Transportation and the 407 is pretty interesting. I’ve mentioned that they failed to meet the contractual obligations to encourage traffic flow and reduce GTA traffic congestion within its tolling, congestion relief and expansion agreement. This is part of the agreement. The 407 knowingly, as a corporation, chose not to actually conform to the contract, with no penalties whatsoever. But they did write to the Minister of Transportation, “407 ETR has initiated discussions with ministry staff and is seeking comfort....” The 407, as a corporation, was seeking comfort.

Interjections: Aw.

Ms. Catherine Fife: For the love of humanity. I mean, really.

They were asking that the government exclude the pandemic period and any congestion penalty payment calculations.

Do you know who needed comfort in the province of Ontario during the peak and the height of a health crisis? Nurses, front-line grocery workers, front-line workers in education, small businesses—you name anybody else during that time. The 407 was doing okay.

And then it’s also important to note that the Ministry of Transportation does not make its traffic data public, despite this government’s own open government directives. But the city of Toronto does make traffic data public, and according to its data, by early June, traffic volumes had begun to substantially recover. This is the other side of the story that we don’t talk about. People were getting back in their cars. They were paying the highest tolls in the country, and many of those were truckers, moving necessary goods and services across this great province.

I have to say, there were some staffers, though, in MTO who tried to hold their own ministry to account, if you will. One of them was Eric Doidge, who was the assistant deputy minister of the operations division. He took issue with the 407 company’s characterization of traffic levels.

So not only were they coming cap in hand saying, “Oh, we’re not generating enough of the revenue. Can you please forgive us?”; they weren’t doing anything to change that.

So this is not a sympathetic situation. This is not a situation where the Minister of Transportation should be providing comfort to the 407.

What should be happening right now is that you should be looking at this proposal. We should be working together to make life more affordable for Ontarians, to help farmers in Ontario move their goods and services at less cost, and faster. There’s no good reason why this government should not adopt this motion. I urge you to give it a second thought, and I look forward to the rest of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I’m pleased to be here to speak on the work that our government has done with respect to transportation in this province and many of the challenges that people are facing across this province, as well.

Before I get into my remarks, I do want to address a comment by the member who just spoke with respect to the 413. I think she said there was no case for Highway 413, and I just couldn’t agree less with that. When you drive on the streets of Milton, Halton region, Brampton, Mississauga, Vaughan, York region, or travel across the 401—I don’t think you could be more out of touch with the realities of the hard-working people of this province.

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We are seeing some of the highest levels of population growth in this province. Just in the next two years, I think we’re expected to see a million new people. A lot of them are moving into the GTA, and we’ve got to make sure that we have the infrastructure to support that. We want to make sure, as a government, that not only are we building highways, as we’ve committed to, like Highway 413, but that we’re also investing in public transit, which our government is doing, to the tune of \$70 billion over the next 10 years. This is really about a whole-of-government approach to investing and transit and highway infrastructure across this province.

I do want to challenge the notion that the MPP from Waterloo said—that there was no case for the Highway 413. I do think that member would benefit from driving on Highway 10, Steeles in Brampton, the Williams Parkway, Mayfield, or even actually in her own region, on Highway 7 and Highway 85. Highway 7 is the busiest two-lane highway in the province, for that matter. Thousands and thousands of people take that every single day, and here’s a government that’s committed to building that and widening it to four lanes as part of additional investments into Highway 413.

These are really, really important, so I want to make sure that the member has the view that we look at this province from its entirety, all across Ontario, and not just a very selective approach. Our government has committed to making sure that we invest in highways like Highway

413, Highway 7, Highway 85 and the 401. Her region has definitely benefited significantly from the investments that we have made.

I think it's also important to recognize that the previous Liberal government failed to make the necessary and adequate investments into our critical infrastructure in this province. They did build some bridges; some of them they built upside-down, unfortunately. They didn't, unfortunately, make the necessary investments into public transit, but our government was there to step up and ensure that we are committing \$70 billion over the next 10 years. But it's more than that. It's about making sure that we keep costs low for families across this province.

Let's look at the track record of this government. When it comes to keeping costs low for families, we want to make sure that we're putting more money back into everyone's pockets. Just in the span of the last budget—this budget, or many fall economic statements that have been presented before the House—we have put forward measures that would reduce the cost for everyday drivers, whether it's the 412 or the 418, and we've removed those tolls. In fact, I introduced a piece of legislation last week that would also prevent tolling on highways in this province.

When we look at some of the rhetoric that comes from the other side with respect to the DVP and the Gardiner, I know some of those members opposite would love to see those tolled. But it's important that the people of this province have certainty and know that we have a piece of legislation like the Get It Done Act, which would amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act to ban any new tolls on provincial highways across this province. It's really important to give the people of this province that certainty, and that's exactly what we did through that. It's also important to note that under that act, any future government that would consider the introduction of tolls would be required to do public consultations before enacting any of those new tolls. I do want to give the background to it and why it's so important for us to have these types of pieces of legislation. There are jurisdictions in North America right now looking at introducing tolls; for example, New York. Their tolls could cost a family up to \$5,000 a year. As we see people moving all across the province and still commuting into the city, or living in different parts of Ontario and still driving to work or taking transit to work, we want to give them that certainty that they won't have to face those tolls when they drive to and from work or go to visit their families.

We have heard first-hand from drivers across our province that making highways toll-free is saving them and their families a lot of their hard-earned money. We are the only party that continues to fight for affordability. In fact, if we take a bit of a history lesson here, the only two governments in this province's history that have introduced tolls on highways were the previous Liberal government and the NDP government—just a bit of a history lesson.

In fact, our government has removed tolls every opportunity that we have had. In April 2022, our government

eliminated tolls on Highway 412 and Highway 418. That is going to save drivers \$68 million between 2022 and 2027.

Interjection.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I think the member for Niagara Falls had—I'm not sure exactly what he said, but I think he had some sort of opposition to that. I do want to remind him that when they had the opportunity to vote in favour of removing these tolls, they did the exact opposite. If anybody wants to check the record, please do check the 2022 budget. This is clearly laid out there. Please look at how the NDP and current Liberals voted on that to see for yourself if they support tolls or if they don't support tolls. It's actually very clear: They've never supported any cost-cutting measure that this government has put forward to help support families in this province.

It's not only families who are going to benefit from fewer tolls. Toll can add to the price of groceries and the goods that we rely on. Everywhere we go, people see rising costs in this province. Even if you don't drive, highway tolls will cost you one way or another. We want to make sure that we have that certainty to families that they deserve better than that, and we're going to make sure more money stays in their pockets and make sure that we're preventing tolls on provincial highways, ensuring that we connect our communities across our province, making jobs more accessible, prices more affordable, and drive our economy for generations to come.

In addition to keeping our highways toll-free, we're putting taxpayers first. With the Get It Done Act that we've put forward, we've introduced legislation which, if passed, would also put a freeze on photo card fees and driver's licences permanently, through legislation, in fact. That freeze has actually saved more than \$22 million since 2019 for drivers and people in this province and will actually save an additional \$66 million more this decade for people in Ontario. As I said, any future proposed increase would require a legislative amendment. We are making it more difficult to hike fees in the future.

We're protecting the wallets of people today and keeping costs down for years to come. We know the people of Ontario deserve better than having any future government raid their bank accounts. So many are struggling today to make ends meet. We're doing everything in our power to ensure that doesn't happen today—not today, not tomorrow, and not ever.

The actions our government is taking do more than save drivers money; they also save them time. In 2022, our government eliminated, for example, the licence plate renewal fees, saving vehicle owners up to \$120 per car or truck a year. This summer, we plan to introduce measures that will automate the licence plate renewal. It will obviously only be available to those who are in good standing. This will save more than eight million Ontario drivers time every single year, including those who drive passenger vehicles, light-duty trucks, motorcycles or even mopeds.

Speaker, our government is also taking action to protect Ontarians from carbon pricing measures that the Liberals

and the NDP love. We are the only party working to save Ontarians money. That's why we've introduced legislation to make it more difficult for provincial governments to introduce a new carbon tax. The Get It Done Act, if passed, would require a referendum before any new carbon pricing measures could be introduced in Ontario, and that would not only cover carbon taxes but other forms of carbon pricing, such as the cap-and-trade system our government scrapped.

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Madam Speaker, the carbon tax is going to make it more expensive to build what we need to keep people and goods moving, and that is why our government will continue to fight an unnecessary carbon tax. We are the only party with a plan to build, and we need to get it done on time and on budget.

People across our province are struggling with rising costs. That is why Premier Ford and our government continue to call on the government of Canada to remove the federal carbon tax. We know if the NDP and the Liberals had their way, Ontarians would be facing more taxes at the pump, more taxes on their heating, and maybe even more taxes while they sleep. Our government will always help keep more of your hard-earned money in your pockets, and we will continue to introduce measures that give people the confidence they can do just that.

The benefits of the Get It Done Act, if passed, are clear. It will make life more affordable for millions of Ontarians by removing unnecessary fees, preventing new tolls on provincial highways, and it will also help us alleviate gridlock, support economic growth and keep goods moving as we build new highways, transit, roads and bridges across our province.

But I really do want to speak to the carbon tax element here just a little bit more, because we're talking about affordability. We're talking about our truckers.

On April 1, the federal government will increase the carbon tax by 23%—a 23% increase. And I have yet to hear a member of the NDP or the Liberals move that their federal counterparts or the federal Prime Minister take action to keep costs low for families. A carbon tax is a tax on everything. Whether you're driving your kids to practice—hockey practice, soccer practice, basketball practice—whether you're going to the grocery store to pick up medicine; whether you're taking your kids to a movie, to enjoy a night out, the carbon tax punishes hard-working families. And it's unacceptable that the federal government, at a time when people are facing some of the most challenging days, are looking at increasing it by 23%.

Let's look at some of the impacts this 23% tax could have on truckers. We're talking about truckers today. Long-haul truckers, under the current carbon tax, are paying anywhere from \$15,000 to \$20,000 of this tax. Think about that: \$15,000 to \$20,000 that an individual could be putting towards their families. Maybe they could be putting that away to help save up for a new house. Maybe they want to put their kids through university or college. Or maybe they just want to see their kids play hockey, register for basketball, for soccer. Or they want to

go on a vacation. Madam Speaker, \$15,000 to \$20,000 is a lot of money.

You have members in this House who actually advocate for a higher carbon tax—the highest carbon tax anywhere in the world. They want to see that right here in Ontario.

We have fought every step of the way, from an affordability perspective, to reduce that cost on Ontario truckers and Ontario drivers.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to our truck drivers—especially during the pandemic. When everybody was sitting at home and worried, they were the ones keeping our shelves stocked. They were the ones delivering medicine to our pharmacies. They were the ones making sure that food got to places on time.

So when we talk about our truckers, we talk about affordability.

Let's look at the carbon tax and why it impacts our truckers across this province, why it impacts so many families. Not only is that trucker paying a huge amount on their fuel costs, of \$15,000 to \$20,000, but when they come home and they've got to drive their kids to school or they've got to drive their kids to practice or they've got to take their kids on a trip, they've got to pay the carbon tax on that again.

When we in this House asked the Liberals and the NDP to support our measures of reducing the gas tax, the fuel tax, by 10 cents a litre, not a single one of them supported those measures. Not a single one of them can understand and appreciate the challenges that families are having, the cost-of-living crisis, the costs that families face on an everyday basis, that when this government—whether it be removing a \$125 fee per car or truck from the val tag perspective, removing that requirement, whether it's fighting the carbon tax with the federal government. They could pick up the phone right now and call Jagmeet and say, "Tell Trudeau to drop this carbon tax. People cannot afford a 23% tax increase."

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: It's going to triple by 2030.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Wow—tripling by 2030, as the Minister of Agriculture just stated.

Madam Speaker, we can take real measures that are going to support truckers and families across this province. That's why we're going to continue to advocate on that perspective all the way until April 1, when we're going to be telling the federal government, "Stop the 23% increase to carbon taxes in this province. People just cannot afford that today."

We're also doing so much more. We're making public transit more affordable and accessible to all. Last week, we launched the One Fare program, which is fully funded by our government. With this new program, commuters pay only once when transferring between GO Transit, the TTC and other transit agencies in the greater Toronto area. At a time when people across the province feel like they're struggling to get ahead, we are putting money back in their pockets, right where it belongs. This will save commuters as much as \$1,600 a year.

Imagine: One Fare, reduce the carbon tax or get rid of the carbon tax—those are real savings for families across

the province. On top of that, add our 10% reduction in fuel costs through the fuel reduction that we proposed. Add on top of that the \$125 per car, per truck that we're saving through the automatic licence renewal. And on top of that, add the freezes that we have put on driver's licence and photo card fees in this province.

We know that families are struggling to keep up with the rising costs of groceries and how to pay for their children's birthday gifts. That is why we continue to propose solutions like One Fare and fighting against the carbon tax. We know these are solutions that have been brought forward to make life more affordable for all Ontarians. Whether you're commuting to work, attending a sporting event or visiting friends and family, transferring from one municipality's transit system to another should be simple, convenient and affordable. And while the previous Liberal government only covered 50% of fares for riders, our government is covering 100% across multiple transit agencies. One Fare is truly simplifying the customer experience and making cross-border travel easier than ever before.

Across the GTA, more than half a million post-secondary students use public transit to get to school. Many of those students spend upwards of \$400 a month just to get to class. No student in Ontario should have to skip class because they can't afford to buy a bus pass. Our government won't stand for that. And it's not just students—no one in Ontario should have to miss out on a job opportunity or a big moment in their life just because they cannot afford transit.

One Fare is a game-changer for anyone who takes transit in the GTA and is part of our plan to make life more affordable. One Fare is just another example of how our government is saving people time and money, making life easier for transit riders. We are working very closely each and every day to make transit a better, more accessible choice for commuters and breaking down those financial and accessibility barriers to taking trains, buses and streetcars.

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Under the leadership of this Premier, we've also introduced new ways to pay, making it more convenient to leave the car at home, hop on local transit and get where you're going. That's what our government accomplished by launching the debit and credit card payments on GO Transit, the TTC, the UP Express and transit systems across the greater Toronto and Hamilton area. And if you don't have a Presto card, no problem. If you forgot to load your funds or left your Presto card at home, that shouldn't stop you from getting where you need to go when you need to get there. There should be an easier way to get to your destination, and thanks to our government, there is. Riders can now tap their physical or digital debit and credit cards to board transit. It's that easy.

Since day one, we have worked tirelessly to make transit the go-to choice for commuters. That's why our government launched Presto for Google Wallet, which allows Android users to pay fares, check their balance and load funds, all from their smart phones. When I go to the

grocery store, I enjoy the convenience to be able to pay by phone, and that should be no different when we're taking transit. Thanks to our government, transit riders will now enjoy that same freedom, because it's about accessibility, it's about affordability, and it's about giving people more ways to pay and access transit. We're doing that by keeping costs low for families and everyday transit riders.

We are also focused on getting people and goods moving. It's no secret that our province is growing exponentially each year, with more than 500,000 newcomers landing each year. I know my colleague the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development provides excellent opportunities to many of the newcomers and settlement services that he provides, to help many of these immigrants who are landing here to succeed once they arrive.

People often come here for a better life and to contribute to our economy, but too often, people are met with gridlock every single day. That's why our government is investing in transit and infrastructure in every corner of our province. We know transit keeps people moving and is a key driver of economic growth. We're not only connecting people to jobs, but we're also connecting them to friends and family, medical appointments, school, and so much more.

We have the most ambitious infrastructure plan in our province's history. We're making historic investments, including \$100 billion over the next decade to build the roads, highways and public transit our growing province desperately needs. This includes more than \$28 billion to renew, build and expand our highway infrastructure in every corner of this province. Whether it's twinning the Trans-Canada Highway outside Kenora, expanding Highway 3 in southwestern Ontario or building Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass in central Ontario, no government has had such a bold vision for getting people and goods moving.

Speaker, we're hard at work getting shovels in the ground in every corner of the province to build the transportation network of the future. As Ontario's population grows, the reality is that we need to build more infrastructure to support our growing communities.

The opposition parties might argue that our gridlock can be solved by carbon taxes and bike lanes; I disagree. Our government knows that this is simply not true. To support the NDP and their vision and the Liberal vision to increase their carbon tax just won't fix gridlock, I'm sorry to say. The reality is that if you drive on our roads today—driving isn't a luxury for people; it's a necessity in the province of Ontario. I just wish some of the Liberal and NDP members could come out to our communities and see for themselves—

Interjection.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Yes. It's unfortunate, because they're almost piggybacking off of the federal environment minister's remarks a couple of weeks ago, when he said he doesn't want to invest in any more road infrastructure in this province. I can't believe how out of touch that statement is with the realities of Ontario, the

realities of what the majority of Canadians face every single day. When you see record growth of population all across Canada, and then to have a federal minister say, “No more roads and bridges. We’re not funding any new projects,” and then to have the NDP and the Liberals here stand up and say, “More carbon tax. Higher carbon taxes”—it’s absolutely ridiculous. It just doesn’t make any sense. I just wish they would drive on the streets of Mississauga, Brampton, Vaughan, York—get out on the 401 and see the communities, see rural Ontario, go drive up in the north and see what they’re actually preaching.

Get out of the Queen’s Park bubble and talk to the people who are stuck in gridlock. Talk to the people who don’t want to pay a 23% increase in the carbon tax. Just walk down the streets. I’m sure even in downtown Toronto you’ll run into people who don’t want to pay an extra 23% on the carbon tax, come April 1. That’s why we’re going to continue fighting really hard to ensure the federal government doesn’t impose that, and also continue to fight hard to make sure that we’re supporting investments like Highway 413, because they are so critical to this province’s future and our fight against gridlock. We need to get shovels in the ground on those projects around the province, and we need to make sure we’re putting more money back into the pockets of hard-working families across this province.

The other thing that I want to touch on is that we obviously had years and years of inaction from the previous Liberal government on building highways and building roads and improving our transportation network and helping reduce gridlock in this province. Gridlock not only affects our productivity, but it hurts our economy, when people can’t get to work on time. It continues to contribute to rising prices, when goods are stuck in transit—something many Ontarians just cannot afford, especially at a time when they’re struggling with the cost of living.

We have a responsibility to build Ontario for the next generation of young people, families and businesses. Unfortunately, the current gridlock commuters face each and every day on our highways and roads costs us more than \$11 billion a year in lost productivity. Gridlock not only increases the cost of the things we buy, but it also reduces access to good jobs and forces too many Ontarians to sacrifice time doing the things they love just to get to and from work. That’s completely unacceptable. Our government won’t stand for that.

Gridlock not only increases the cost of everything we buy, but it stifles access to good jobs. It forces far too many Ontarians to sacrifice their quality of life just to get to and from work. Too many people are stuck in hours of bumper-to-bumper traffic, just to have to do it all again every single day. People shouldn’t have to give up the time doing things that they love just because of how long it takes them to get home or to work. Our government has had enough of that. We need to do something now before the situation spirals out of control even further.

That is why our government is taking action. This year alone, we’re spending more than \$3 billion to repair and

expand highways and bridges across this province. That includes \$1.5 billion on rehabilitation projects and \$726 million on expansion projects. These investments will not only help get people and goods to their destination safely, but they’ll save Ontarians hours each week, allowing them to spend more time doing what matters most to them, like spending time with their family.

Another example is moving forward to build Highway 413, as I’ve spoken to many times in this presentation—a new 400-series highway that will be toll-free. Highway 413 will keep people and goods moving across the growing regions of Halton, Peel and York, and will save drivers up to 30 minutes each way, or one hour a day, on their commute. That’s right; somebody who commutes every single day, five days a week, 30 minutes each way—that’s five hours of their week back to spend with their family. I just want to make sure I specify that again: That’s an hour every day that you get to spend with your family instead of being stuck in gridlock—now multiply that by five, and you have five hours a week that you get to spend with your family, enjoying doing what you do best.

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Couple that with a reduction in the carbon tax, which I don’t know why the NDP and Liberals don’t want to support. They don’t want us to build highways. They actually want to punish you for driving. This is the ideology of the left, of the Liberals, of the NDP. They think you can drive your bike or walk to work every single day, but they don’t know the realities of people in Brampton and Mississauga and Vaughan and rural Ontario, across this province, and the challenges that we face.

That’s why we’ll continue to fight for infrastructure. We’re going to continue to fight to build highways. We’re going to continue to build public transit the entire way, because we know that we’re going to save people time; we’re going to increase productivity in this province; we’re going to attract more jobs; and we’re going to put more money back into your pockets by fighting the carbon tax across this province.

As a government, we will not stand by idly as gridlock gets worse. We cannot pass up on the opportunity to build Highway 413, and we absolutely won’t. I know that the Liberals and NDP have special interest groups that they listen to when it comes to building highways and their opposition to highways. But this government—we listen to the people on the ground. We listen to the drivers each and every single day who tell us, “Build new highways.” That’s exactly what we’re going to do, because we listen to the people who are driving on these roads every single day. Personally, I’ve felt that gridlock as I drive into work every single day, as well. We will not pass up the ability to build Highway 413.

Let’s not forget, the people of this province delivered a very strong message to the NDP and Liberals. On June 2, 2022, that party lost three of their members who opposed the 413. They opposed it; they did everything they could to try to stop; they tried everything they knew to spin, and it didn’t—well, we can just ask them how that worked out

for them, because I don't see those three members from Brampton here anymore. I think there was a member from Brampton East, Brampton North and Brampton Centre—they're all gone now. Actually, even better, they're on this side of the House—they represent the government now, because the people believed in their vision to build Ontario, to build this province and to build highways because they appreciate the challenges that come with everything, every single day when driving to and from work.

However, it's frustrating that the opposition continues to oppose these solutions. Ontario has a growing population. Studies show that even with the current status of the 407, our highways will reach capacity. The NDP is just simply out of touch with reality. They are more focused on ideology than common-sense solutions that will make a significant difference in people's lives.

Highway 413 will connect Highway 400 in the east to the Highway 401/407 interchange in the west, 62 kilometres connecting communities across York, Peel and Halton regions and providing access to well-paying jobs and opportunities that will set Ontario up for success in the years ahead. Highway 413 will provide extensions to Highway 410 and Highway 427 as well as 11 interchanges. It will save commuters five hours every week, as I mentioned, if you use the highway every day. Rather than being stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic for hours on end, hard-working Ontarians will be able to make it home in time to have dinner with their loved ones. Right now, that's just a dream for many, but it will become a reality under our government as we improve public infrastructure and as we improve highway infrastructure. That is why building Highway 413 continues to be a priority for us, and we're the only party that will get it done.

Speaker, Highway 413 will also fuel our economy. Building Highway 413 will support up to 3,500 jobs annually and generate \$350 million in GDP. This is even more reason for us to get to work and build this highway as soon as possible. No matter how you look at it—from job creation, the time-saving for Ontarians or the economic benefits that come with a better transportation network—building Highway 413 is the right thing to do.

The NDP and the Liberals say no to these solutions. They only offer band-aid solutions.

On this side of the House, we're building for our future. We're making sure that what the previous Liberal government did, which is have people stuck in gridlock across the entire GTHA—that we don't repeat the same mistakes that that previous government does.

As someone who commutes every single day to work in Toronto, I understand the frustrations of gridlock first-hand. I know we would all spend much more time with the people we love rather than being stuck in that traffic. That's why we're building new highway infrastructure in Ontario.

The Bradford Bypass is another good example as to a solution to fight gridlock. By connecting two existing highways, people in Simcoe country and York region will have better access to housing and jobs. This four-lane

freeway will connect Highway 400 to Highway 404 and save drivers up to 35 minutes per trip. And like Highway 413, the Bradford Bypass will be toll-free.

Gridlock continues to overcome our roadways, and Ontarians deserve speedy solutions. That's why we're focused on bringing the Bradford Bypass into service as soon as possible. A preliminary design, engineering and field investigations for the bypass were completed last month, and we're working on an RFP to build the first section of the highway. This project will not only ease gridlock for the people of York region and improve the lives of Ontarians for generations to come, but it will connect more men and women in road-building and the skilled trades to life-changing careers.

Just like Highway 413, the Bradford Bypass will give our economy a huge boost during and after construction. During construction, the Bradford Bypass will support more than 700 jobs per year and generate more than \$70 million annually. When you consider the time savings for Ontarians, the economic benefits and the job creation, it's clear that we need to get to work on the Bradford Bypass without delay. That is why our government is continuing to move forward with base construction, starting with the west section. At the end of the year, we initiated pre-procurement activities for this phase, and construction is anticipated to start shortly.

Despite what some parties want people to believe, you simply cannot fight gridlock without building these new highways. Highway 401 is already one of the most congested highways in North America, and with other major highways quickly reaching their breaking point, doing nothing is just simply not an option. That is why we have also widened an 18-kilometre stretch of the 401 west of Toronto. This 18-kilometre stretch on the 401 is among the slowest sections of the 400-series highways in the province. This stretch now has new lanes running in each direction from the Credit River in Mississauga to Regional Road 25 in Milton. This expansion will also help more than 250,000 drivers spend less time in gridlock and more time with their families each night.

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We've also made improvements to the 401 in western Ontario. For example, in Cambridge, we added eight kilometres of new lanes, including HOV lanes to Highway 401, from Highway 8 to Townline Road. In eastern Ontario, we have plans in motion to improve the 401 by adding new lanes and repairing or replacing existing bridges.

Interjections.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I can see the members opposite don't appreciate what adding eight new kilometres of lanes can do for a highway, but this is why we're committed to building highways and supporting infrastructure across the province.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: They need to get out of the bubble.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Exactly. The Minister of Agriculture has said exactly what I wanted to say: The NDP and Liberals need to get out of this bubble

of downtown Toronto and listen to the people of this province from every corner of this province. It's not just about downtown, King Street, University, Bay Street; it's about the people that live all across Ontario. I know there are some members here that represent some rural parts of the riding. I know they probably can't say it, but I know they don't support comments like, "Let's never build the roads or invest in roads ever again"—because we know that you can't bike from North Bay or Thunder Bay to Toronto. This is why our government takes a whole-of-government approach, and—

Interjection.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Do you know what? Yes, we are actually building passenger rail in the north as well, so we've got every avenue covered. That's why we're not letting ourselves be bogged down by the ideological left that doesn't want us to build highways and doesn't want us to invest in roads and bridges. We're taking a whole-of-government approach, a whole-province approach of building bridges, highways, roads, public transit and passenger rail all across this province while also introducing legislation that removes tolls, that fights against the carbon tax, because that is what the people elected us to do in this province.

More people, we know, in this province means more traffic. When we see the increasing immigration that's going to happen in this province as we grow, we have to make sure that we are responding by increasing investment in infrastructure. For example, in the tri-city region of Waterloo, which is the third-fastest-growing region in all of Canada—anyone who has driven through Kitchener, Waterloo, Guelph knows all too well that more people means more traffic, and that means we need more investments.

That is why we were there two weeks ago to announce a significant milestone on a stretch of Highway 7 between Kitchener and Guelph, which is among, as I said earlier, the busiest two-lane highways in Ontario. Every day 26,000 vehicles travel through this corridor. We can't just maintain the status quo; 26,000 vehicles stuck in gridlock is unacceptable. After the previous Liberal government, unfortunately, promised to build Highway 7 between Kitchener and Guelph in 2007, they shelved this project for over a decade, wasting millions of dollars in the process. The people of Kitchener and Waterloo have waited too long for a new Highway 7, which will be a game-changer to reduce gridlock in that community.

That's why, under the leadership of Premier Ford, we are taking action. Contractors are being invited to submit proposals for the replacement of the Frederick Street bridge in Kitchener to accommodate the future widening of Highway 7. The bridge will need to be lengthened to ensure traffic can flow in both directions, with shoulders and multi-use paths accessible for pedestrians and also for cyclists.

Once complete, the future Highway 7 will include seven interchanges between Kitchener and Guelph. It will have a multi-level connection to Highway 85, a new crossing over the Grand River and local road improve-

ments to keep communities in the region connected. The new Highway 7 is another step to fight gridlock, keeping goods and people moving across the fastest-growing regions of Kitchener, Waterloo and Guelph, while providing relief to the over-congested Highway 401.

Our government also understands and appreciates the transportation needs northern Ontario has. The Highway 11-17 corridor between Thunder Bay and Nipigon remains a vital link to the Trans-Canada Highway, but with many stretches having only one lane in each direction, that link is vulnerable. If there is a collision or road closure, there's no alternate route for drivers. This leaves drivers unable to reach their destination and goods stuck in transit, hurting Ontarians across the province, not just in the north. Our government won't stand for this and we have a plan to fix it, Madam Speaker.

That's why we're investing in targeted projects for the north, like expanding 100 kilometres of Highway 11 and Highway 17, widening Highway 11 and Highway 17 from two to four lanes as part of our commitment to widening the Trans-Canada Highway in certain portions, and I'm pleased that more than half of that work is complete; almost 58 kilometres of the Thunder Bay-Nipigon corridor now has four lanes. Construction is currently under way on two other sections of the highway as well.

We're also adding two additional lanes to the Trans-Canada Highway between Kenora and the Manitoba border, and we're making progress on a 2+1 highway pilot on Highway 11 just north of North Bay. Our government is leading the way as this will be the first project of its kind in North America as we move forward with our plan to build stronger transportation for the north.

As I said before, we're not just building highways; we're taking a balanced approach. For every one dollar we're investing in highways, we're investing three in public transit. We're making historic investments in transit infrastructure in every corner of our province, because we know transit keeps people moving and is a key driver of economic growth. We're not only connecting people to jobs, but also connecting them to friends and family, medical appointments, school and so much more.

That's why we are investing \$80 billion over the next 10 years to build a world-class transit network for all Ontarians. This starts with making transit more accessible and more affordable. As our population grows and continues to grow, we need our transit system to keep pace. That's why we're using every tool in our toolbox to get priority transit projects built as quickly as possible. In fact, shovels are already in the ground to build new subways like the Ontario Line. That is a monumental project. The Ontario Line will add 15 kilometres of new subway tracks to the city of Toronto. With 15 new subway stations, the Ontario Line will accommodate up to 40 trains per hour and nearly 400,000 riders a day. It will reduce crowding at the TTC's busiest stations by as much as 16%. Wait times for trains will be as short as 90 seconds. We're putting thousands more Toronto residents within walking distance of public transit, and expanding people's access to jobs and other life-changing opportunities.

From the Ontario Line, riders will be able to connect to the Lakeshore East, Lakeshore West and Stouffville GO lines, the TTC's Line 1 and Line 2 subways, the future Eglinton Crosstown LRT and multiple streetcar lines, including the King, Queen, Bathurst, Spadina, Harbourfront, Gerrard and Carlton routes. We're getting it done for Ontarians and creating an integrated network that will offer more convenient and accessible transit options to commuters throughout the GTA.

Madam Speaker, the Ontario Line construction is well under way. Contracts have already been awarded for the building of the southern portion of the Ontario Line, the Pape tunnel and underground stations, and the elevated guideway and station contracts. Our government recognizes the importance of building transit that will connect communities and create new travel options for people across the greater Toronto area.

As Toronto's population continues to grow, we can't afford not to build the critical infrastructure that we so desperately need. That's why we're rolling up our sleeves to build a subway system that will keep our province thriving well into the future.

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Our government is moving quickly to get important projects like the Ontario Line built. That's why we introduced the Building Transit Faster Act. The legislation introduced several measures to accelerate the delivery of priority transit projects throughout Ontario. The Ontario Line is one of many priority projects that our government is moving forward with.

We're also working on the Yonge North subway extension, which extends the TTC's Line 1 subway by approximately eight kilometres into Richmond Hill. The Yonge North subway extension will accommodate more than 94,000 daily trips, offering commuters a connection to local transit and GO rail. The extension will put 26,000 people within walking distance of public transit and save commuters at least 40 minutes each day.

We're well on our way to reducing gridlock, connecting people to more jobs, making travel between York region and Toronto faster and easier than ever before, and we aren't stopping there.

We aren't just expanding the options north of Toronto; commuters in Scarborough deserve the same access to fast and reliable public transit as commuters in the rest of Toronto. That's why we are building the Scarborough subway extension, another priority transit project that will add three stops and almost eight kilometres of track to the TTC's Line 2 subway. The Scarborough subway extension will offer commuters connections to GO Transit and Durham Region Transit, and it will serve as a key component of our plan to make the GTA one of the most integrated transit networks in North America.

We are also making transit more accessible to commuters in the 905, with tunnelling work now under way for the Eglinton Crosstown West extension. This project will extend the Eglinton Crosstown LRT west into Etobicoke and Mississauga, increasing connectivity along Eglinton Avenue to Renforth Drive. The Crosstown West

Extension will add 9.2 kilometres of new track to the Crosstown LRT and seven new stops, making life that much easier for riders west of Toronto. The Eglinton Crosstown LRT will accommodate 37,000 riders per day from the east end of Toronto to Mississauga and enhance connectivity to other transit systems throughout the region. Eglinton Crosstown riders will be able to connect on the UP Express and Kitchener GO line at Mount Dennis, as well as TTC bus service at transit stops in Toronto and MiWay and GO bus service via Mississauga Transitway at Renforth.

We're delivering on our promise to get it done, and we aren't stopping there.

The 18-kilometre Hazel McCallion Line will open a new world of possibilities for the residents of Brampton and Mississauga, providing connections to GO Transit, Brampton Transit, the Mississauga Transitway and other transit networks. Our government is moving forward to declare the Hazel McCallion Line extensions to the downtown Mississauga loop and downtown Brampton a priority transit project, allowing us to move forward with this critical work as quickly as possible. We are transforming the way that people travel across Peel and the greater Toronto area by building the Hazel McCallion LRT and its extensions. The Hazel McCallion Line will deliver more frequent and more reliable service to two of Canada's fastest-growing cities. With a dedicated right-of-way and signal priority at intersections, the new LRT will get commuters where they're going more quickly than current bus routes.

By making this historic investment, our government is connecting more people than ever before to good jobs, housing and life-changing opportunities across the greater Toronto area. We are focused on delivering practical solutions that will make public transit affordable and convenient for Ontarians. That's why we're also calling on the federal government to agree to a cost-sharing partnership to help deliver two-way, all-day GO service along the Milton GO rail corridor, one of the busiest lines on the GO network. We're also hard at work improving our GO network to enhance services and accessibility by building new amenities and additional platforms at GO stations, paving the way for two-way, all-day service on the busiest GO routes.

Our government is serious about building transit, and we're serious about expanding transit options to commuters in Brampton, Mississauga, Milton and across our province as quickly as possible. Our Get It Done Act will help us do just that. We are laser-focused on getting shovels in the ground quicker than ever before to connect communities across the greater Golden Horseshoe, and we need the federal government to step up to the plate to help us continue this important work.

Madam Speaker, I've said this before, but it bears repeating. Our government has the most ambitious infrastructure plan in our province's history. But we can't put that into action when we're met with red tape. That's why we tabled the Get It Done Act this last month. If passed, we're going to accelerate the construction of the transit

and housing infrastructure we need to support future generations.

We need to save Ontarians money wherever we can. If passed, Bill 162 will make it easier to build the infrastructure Ontario needs to support growing communities while helping families keep more of their hard-earned money in their pockets so they can do the things that they want to do. The Get It Done Act will allow us to plan, approve and build projects faster than ever before. We won't let red tape get in the way of our ability to build roads, build bridges and public transit that our province so desperately needs.

As we come up on the conclusion of my remarks, I think I just want to reiterate a couple of things. Doing nothing is just simply not an option, and that is why this government has been committed to building highways and transit across this province. We are committed to supporting the people of this province because we believe in the need to invest in infrastructure, and we believe in the need to invest and keep costs down for families across this province. Every step of the way, this government has put more money back into the pockets of hard-working families.

On April 1, the carbon tax will be going up by over 23%. The NDP and the Liberal governments here in the province need to reach out to their federal partners and put a stop to the increase in this carbon tax.

We're going to build Highway 413 because that is what we were elected to do. The people of this province sent a strong message to the government, to those who are represented here by their elected members, that we need to build more transit, that we need to keep costs low. That's why we're going to continue to fight the 23% increase that we're about to see in their carbon tax.

I urge the members of the NDP and Liberals to please drive on the streets of our communities, get out of the Queen's Park bubble and see for yourself the challenges families are having with the high cost of the carbon tax. Get out of this bubble and look at the gridlock people are facing on the roads every single day. Let us build Highway 413. Stop getting in the way. Stop listening to those protest groups. Stop listening to those who want to obstruct everything that we're trying to do in this province because we believe in—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Thank you.

Further debate?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Wow, Speaker. I listened intently to the minister speaking for an hour, and I noticed three things—three things. The first thing that I noticed was he drank about a couple of gallons of water. I asked myself what was going on there, and I understand that it was hard to swallow the things he was saying so he had to keep drinking water and water and water.

He talked about shovels. He talked—

Interjections.

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Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Truth hurts. He talked about shovels, and there was shovelling—about an hour of solid shovelling.

The third thing that I noticed, and it was a question I asked myself: What does this minister have against the drivers of Ontario? What does he have against truckers? Really, what does he have against safety for driving in the north? Almost six years of a Conservative government, and I ask my members: Are the roads in the north any safer?

Interjections: No.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: No. I ask the members that. How about, is this government willing to take on insurance companies gouging us during the pandemic? Gouging us, making record profits—is this government willing to take them to task?

Interjections: No.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: No, of course not. Where do you think they get their money from?

Third of all, was this minister even willing to talk about a bill to remove gridlock off of the 401? No, absolutely not. Not for truckers, who go out there in the middle of the morning, driving all night, bringing our goods from here to there, making the economy go. Let's get them off the 401 and put them on the 407 for free. Did he want to talk about that? Did he spend 10 minutes talking about that?

Interjections: No.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Five minutes?

Interjections: No.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: A minute?

Interjections: No.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: One second?

Interjections: No.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Nothing—absolutely nothing, because it's embarrassing. They're going to call the Minister of Transportation and say, "Hey, we heard this great idea from the NDP. Are you going to get behind it? You had an hour to talk about it."

Interjection.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Listen to that. Look at that. His conscience is coming out, and it's a battle with his conscience. He's frustrated because he has got to take his conscience—he has got to shove it right down. That's what he has got to do.

Interjection.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Yes. If a page could bring him more water.

Now, the thing is—

Interjections.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: He's so frustrated.

I want to take you back in time. I think we all know where they stand. They don't like drivers. They're not willing to help truckers, and they're not willing to even talk about this great motion today, so let's move on. Let's talk about the 407. They don't want to talk about the 407, one of the greatest embarrassments of a Conservative government anywhere on this planet—Highway 407.

Imagine: The Conservative government of the 1950s was looking at the 401, hearing about how the 401 at the time—we're talking decades ago, generations ago—was already becoming congested back then. So there was a conversation at the time: "Let's ease the congestion. Let's

build another highway north of it.” That government didn’t get it done. This government always gets it undone, of course, but they didn’t get it done. The next decade, Conservatives didn’t get it done. They didn’t get it done after that.

It was a government in the 1990s, an NDP government, that actually got highway building done, a visionary project. Imagine what they built. It was, for its time, absolutely forward-thinking, unlike Conservative governments like this one that are always having to think back and walk back things that they do. This NDP government came out with a highway poured with concrete. In fact, the ways on and off the highway at the time were visionary. They had technological systems put in place where you had transponders; you had cameras getting your licence plates—imagine, no toll booths. It was so forward-thinking financially it would pay for itself.

Not long after, shovels got in the ground—not like the shovelling he has done for the last hour. Get him some water. What happened at the time—

Mr. Trevor Jones: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Order. The member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington has a point of order.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Speaker, I have yet to actually hear the charismatic speaker from across the aisle order anything through the Chair. He has yet to address the Speaker through his narrative. And he’s straying a great distance from actually the content of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): A reminder that all comments must be made through the Chair.

The member may resume.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: They’re mad. They’re angry. You can’t blame them; they’re angry. They hate truth. It’s like shining light on a vampire. They hate it. They recoil. They can’t stand it, and they don’t want to hear it either.

Get the minister some more water, please.

So what happened was that after that, we had a Conservative government come in with a lack-of-sense revolution. The lack-of-sense revolution came in, and, oh, my gosh, what did they do? Montgomery Burns from *The Simpsons* was sitting there at the cabinet, making calls. Literally, you could find the biggest neo-cons in the world sitting there, giving them the play-by-play of what to do. Imagine that government of the time. It was like religion. It was dogma—privatization. Did you know that they actually appointed a minister of privatization? Imagine. And that same minister, when he was in charge of correctional services, tried to privatize all the jails.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I remember that.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Imagine that.

One of the first things that they privatized—and I’ve got articles all over here calling the 407 deal the worst deal in history. It is an absolute shame. I want to hear the minister apologize for that deal, seriously. Go back in time, come out here and apologize for it. The thing is, they sold it at fire sale costs. They got up there and—get this—they sold it for \$3 billion. But this is the clincher: They

tied a generation to gridlock on the 401. And do you know what they sold the next 70 years for? Has anyone got a number? It was \$100 million. They condemned four generations of drivers on the 401 and the 407 to eventually pay the highest toll rates in the known universe. That’s what they did, and he doesn’t want to talk about it, of course. Why would any Conservative want to talk about the biggest embarrassment of their time?

So that’s what happened: It got sold. And do you know what they did with part of the money? I need water to think about this. They paid every voter \$200 in Ontario in that election, out of that money, to try to get re-elected. You can’t make this up. So they did this, and then what happened after that? Within a couple of years, one of the private interests—and it was international interests buying up this incredible, state-of-the-art, forward-thinking highway that would pay for itself. They bought it up, and the valuation went double, triple, four times its amount within a couple of years, showing the absolutely horrible business sense of the Premier at the time.

Even worse, imagine when critics were saying, “Oh, my God, the rates are going to go right through the roof on this highway.” Imagine, the Conservative minister—trust them on money, of course. “No, the rates would go down by 30% on this highway,” they said, by privatizing—because it’s religion for them. And do you know what happened in that time window, when they said it would go down by 30%? Imagine: Rates went up by 300%. It’s unbelievable. So that’s where we were at.

Let’s talk about the 407. What did the 407 ETR do during that period of time? Lawsuits. People would come and complain, and you’d hear the stories in the media about people saying that they didn’t even get the first bill. Years later, they got a bill for thousands of dollars and they were being told to pay. That same 407 ETR, going after people who were bankrupt—bankrupt. And do you know what? The courts had to order that money back. This was happening over and over again, and the rates climbed and climbed and climbed. Thanks, Conservatives. They climbed and climbed and climbed. It just went higher and higher and higher, and it became the envy of every greedy toll highway on this planet. Imagine.

And so that was where we were at: plate denials as part of that original contract—probably the worst, most poorly written contract by a Conservative government—by any government, anywhere. That contract—imagine this—

Interjection: A pretty high bar.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Yes, it is, but they achieved it. That was something they got done—the worst contract ever, right?

And so what did they do? They made it such that you couldn’t sue them. Governments couldn’t get the actual rates under control—nothing—and governments tried to take them to court. This is the contract that was written for them, ironclad, leaving us, to this very day, with 71 cents a kilometre on one of the routes.

And on the provincially owned—by the way, they don’t want to take the tolls off the provincially owned part. They’re collecting money on that. They don’t want to tell

you. It's one of those—you pull back the curtain and they're collecting money on the publicly, provincially owned part: 33 cents.

1500

The minister talked about New York—on their publicly owned throughway, it's something like seven cents a kilometre. I want to hear the minister apologize for that. He could have done something about it. He's not willing to do anything. Why? Because he doesn't like drivers. And what this government wants to do is make the rich richer and richer and richer. And it doesn't matter; it will never stop with these guys.

Imagine this: Drivers on the 407 everywhere are feeling defeated. What's it going to take? Almost something supernatural on the side of the government to be able to go back into that contract, get it and say, "How do we fix this garbage that was done by the Harris government in the 1990s?"

Then, a pandemic happened, and the one fail-safe that Conservatives had the foresight to write in—probably thinking it would never happen—was that if ridership got below a certain level, then they would owe \$1 billion dollars to the taxpayers. And during the pandemic, when everybody was struggling, small businesses losing money, and all those big guys raising up profits—grocers, insurance companies—making money, would this government do anything about it? No.

But behind secret, closed doors, the 407—they met with the special interest group I talked about sitting here on their shoulder and said, "Guys, please don't make us pay. We can't afford it. We make over \$1 billion a year. Don't make us lose \$1 billion."

They weren't willing to help everyday working Ontarians—nurses, health care workers—but for the people running the 407? Oh, man, that's their base. What did they do? They said, "Yes, sir. Yes, sir," just like when Enbridge called and said, "Reverse that OEB decision. What are we paying you for?"

I'll tell you, the only people a Conservative government ever gets it done for is the 1%. The 1% of the 1% is who they get it done for. The one chance they had—and they didn't do anything about it. What a shame. What an absolute shame.

That's why I began with this, that the minister—

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Speaker, Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I'm sorry to interrupt the member.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Order. Stop the clock.

Order. The House will come to order.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): The member from Niagara Falls and the government House leader will come to order.

Start the clock.

The member may resume.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you. They don't want to hear it. It's tough for them. In fact, I commiserate with

them, because at the end of the day their backbench doesn't get to make decisions. Their parliamentary assistants don't get to make decisions. Their ministers don't even get to make decisions. The decisions that run this government are special interests and the special interests of the 1%—they are the ones that direct the agenda. Their PR guy sometimes gets them to roll it back every once in a while—they hate it. You give them truth—I told you—it's like spraying holy water on them; they recoil. They fizzle; you can see steam coming off the government benches as I speak.

I want to say, on behalf of all Ontario drivers, shame on this government. Shame on them for not standing up for drivers, shame on them for not standing up for truckers, and shame on them for the 407 deal, the worst deal any government made in the history of this world.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It has been a very spirited afternoon. Lots of passion on all—well, on one side of the House.

I am very pleased to be able to stand here as the infrastructure, transportation and highways critic on behalf of the NDP. I will acknowledge the comments from my colleagues that I am following—and I'm hoping to never again in my political career have to follow the member from Humber River–Black Creek because nothing I say is going to hold water compared to that.

However, I'm very pleased to be able to take my place as the critic for infrastructure, transportation and highways and speak to this important opposition day motion. While I'm glad that the Minister of Transportation has been participating in the debate, I would have loved to have heard the government have a little more understanding of what the needs are across our communities.

As a member who represents a riding in the Durham region—we have the esteemed privilege of being the only region with that 407 east, that part of the 407 that's provincially owned and that is still tolled; and the 412 and the 418 that had been provincial toll roads. I had introduced a private member's bill supported by the broad Durham region, and four years later, the government did take those tolls off, and so the only portion of provincial highways right now that are still tolled are, indeed, in Durham region.

Speaker, this is a government that has a bill on the table, and they've hopefully named it the Get It Done Act, but it doesn't get anything done for the people in Durham region. It doesn't get anything done for the folks across the province who are interested in having the toll conversation and who are interested in having the public infrastructure conversation. They want to be safe on the 401 if they're stuck in traffic; they want to be able to get to work or to school or home to their families and their loved ones and just keep moving. Part of the challenge on the 401 is the congestion and the truck traffic. Anyone who has been in bad weather or been in traffic on the 401 knows that they have felt quite nervous at one point or another with all of the trucks on the highway.

Here we are with a thoughtful motion in front of us, an opposition day motion—which, for the folks at home, is a chance for the opposition to say, “Here is a good idea that we want this government to pick up and run with.” We want this to be an important conversation that we have and move forward with. The opposition day motion we’re debating is to remove the tolls from the 407 for transport trucks. If that were to happen, if they were able to drive on the 407 without paying the exorbitant tolls, then what we understand from industry, what we understand from safety experts is that more and more of those trucks would be off of the 401 corridor and onto the 407. And if that were to happen, we’d end up with a win-win situation: that we have the supply chain, that we’ve got folks in industry, able to more predictably move their goods; that more and more of their trucks would not be stuck in traffic on the 401. I think it would be an improvement for safety. And I think that of all the things that we have talked about in this House today when it comes to the 407—about the underutilization of this infrastructure; about the ability to differently utilize that space; keep folks flowing and going. I don’t understand why the government is unwilling to have that conversation.

Certainly, in Durham region, people have been talking about this for a while, about how to better utilize that public infrastructure. From March of last year: “Clarington Seeks Relief from Heavy Truck Traffic

“The municipality of Clarington is calling on the province to make Highway 407 toll-free for heavy trucks carrying aggregates in north Durham.” And this was a specific ask.

They said, “The provincial government is prioritizing new housing development. Therefore, the municipality of Clarington is asking the Ontario government to waive toll fees on Highway 407 for heavy trucks carrying construction materials in north Durham for a trial period of one year.

“Let’s get these heavy trucks off our rural roads.” It goes on to say, “‘These big heavy trucks want to get from point A to point B as quickly as possible, so Highway 407 makes all the sense in the world,’ said Clarington mayor Adrian Foster.”

Well, that was a point in time to solve a problem, and the government wasn’t interested in that. But it has been an idea for a long time.

I have stood in this House and I have shared that not too long ago, the region of Durham reached out to this government and said that, because of construction on Winchester and road closures on Columbus Road in Brooklin—a specific area in north Whitby. Because of a lot of construction happening, they were looking for a temporary relief of tolls—again, we are predicting this major backlog and problem with construction, and this is just temporary.

What it says is, “‘The ministry (of transportation) is not considering subsidizing or removing tolls for use of Highway 407 at this time,’ came a response from the Ministry of Transportation on February 6....” That was like a week later—a quick turnaround. The government

was not willing to work with municipal partners to remove tolls, even temporarily.

1510

And here we are again, raising the fact that while this is not a local issue, it’s local for every person who drives on the 407. They want to get where they’re going. Every single person who is driving on the 401 wants to get where they’re going predictably, safely, quickly.

This government is so committed to their Highway 413, and we’ve talked a bit about that today. I don’t like it. I’ll say it: I don’t want the 413. You guys might love it; you’ll say that there are other people who do, but the ones I talk to don’t.

Regardless, the 413 is not a solution—for the next 10 years at best. In the interim, what are you doing?

We’ve got a highway that, as we have heard about in the past—and granted, this was an unusual circumstance—a plane landed on it in an emergency. A small plane was able to land because there was enough room. That is not a crowded, congested highway. This is an opportunity to differently utilize that road.

Speaker, there are benefits to having the trucks beyond that 407, and I think if the folks in this room, I think if the minister, who is from Brampton—he knows, other members know, that the trucking industry has an important voice and they have been asking for supports. This is a piece that would make a real difference for them, to be able to move their trucks predictably.

I remember—and this was a long time, this was before that General Motors chapter—that I had been visiting, and they had a screen that had all of their products and where they were travelling, the trucks that were moving the new vehicles all around the place. You’d better believe that they keep tabs on where their product is going and when it’s being delivered and all of that. I asked them, just off the cuff, “The 407 is fairly far north from this route, but would it ever make sense for you to go there? Is there a sweet spot in what that would cost? If it were a reduced rate, if it were cheaper, would you put your trucks up there?” They were very interested in that, because trucks full of product—in this case vehicles, but it could be any product—stuck in traffic is not good for anyone. It’s not good for the environment. It’s not good for business. It’s not good for all of the people stuck in traffic with them. This government is not interested in having this conversation, which I find fascinating.

A member before me took us back and gave us a history lesson. Back in the 1990s, the illustrious Conservative government of that day, the Harris Conservatives, sold off this public infrastructure, sold off the 407, for a song. It wasn’t actually a song—was it \$3 billion, which was never a lot. Now we have a government that is willing to let a billion dollars slip through their fingers in congestion penalties that the 407 has owed us. If people don’t remember that—that was a billion dollars that, because the 407 ETR had not met its obligations, they contractually owed the province. According to the FOI documents that folks pulled from that time, there were conversations with the government, and however it was decided, the

government did not make them have to pay that. We turned our backs on a billion dollars. I didn't know that was the kind of money—we could just wave our hands and say, “Don't worry. Pick up lunch next week.” That's a billion dollars. There were other opportunities during that, whether it was renegotiation or a sit-down with 407 ETR, and this government didn't take that opportunity, according to the FOI documents that were pulled from that time. The government wasn't even talking to them about reducing the tolls or forgiving tolls or anything to do with the experience of drivers. What a missed opportunity.

We've remembered in debate today that the 407 ETR used to chase people for their overdue bills and had a garbage way of billing so that people would not know they were in arrears, and then all of a sudden, their bill would go from whatever it was—\$200 to \$6,000 kind of thing, which was obviously problematic; no one is arguing it isn't. But now, the province—we're the bill collectors. The province is the heavy. Because isn't it the case—someone correct me if I'm wrong—that you can't renew your licence if you have an outstanding 407 bill? So we are the enforcers. We're the collection agency. You don't think we have any leverage? You don't think we could start a conversation that goes something like, “Hey, you want your money? Let's sit down and have a conversation. Remember we forgave you that billion dollars. Want to talk?”

By the way, a side note, just a little think-aloud: If now we have automatic licence renewals, does that mean we don't have to pay 407 bills? Or is the government going to come to your house? How are you going to collect that? That's a logistical question.

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: No.

So, Speaker, what we have here is an opportunity for this government to say, “Opposition, this is a good idea. This is a good idea to have a conversation with the operators of the 407 and say, ‘We're not using this infrastructure the way that we should, and what we would like is, indeed, to take the tolls off for transport trucks. We want to shift our traffic patterns. We want to keep people flowing and going, being safe, getting home to their families, getting where they need to go.’” Here's a perfect opportunity, a way to start that conversation, and I would encourage the government to make this happen and take the tolls off the 407 for transport trucks in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I recognize the leader of the official opposition.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to thank all my colleagues for their remarks this afternoon. That was just fantastic.

I will have to say, the member from Humber River–Black Creek, the little reminder, the history lesson—I think that would make a really great children's story, actually, one day, so maybe we'll have to work on that together.

I think what we heard from the government member speaking to this really sums it up. This is a government that is willing to allow people to wait for at least 10 years

for relief, at a time when here in the province of Ontario, people are struggling more than, certainly, in generations just to get by. This is a real opportunity. This motion that we've brought forward, which would take the tolls off of transport trucks on the 407, is just one small way to make life more affordable and easier for so many people in this province.

I think that the members here who spoke today made it very clear that this government had a choice. They made a choice to allow a billion dollars to be waived—a billion dollars that were penalties that the 407 actually owes Ontarians. They just let that go—that made that free for the company—rather than using that as a bargaining opportunity, frankly, for the people of Ontario. We could have extracted some good out of that. I think it's not too late, frankly. Now is the time.

I ask the members opposite: Let's try to make life be better for people in the province of Ontario. Let's try to get people to their homes, to their families quicker. Let's try to move those trucks along a little faster. Let's get things moving. Let's actually get something done in the province of Ontario for the good of the people who live here and who we serve. Let's get something done. Let's pass this motion. Let's move Ontario forward.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): MPP Stiles has moved opposition day number 1. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say “aye.”

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

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. There will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1520 to 1530.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Members, please be seated. The Associate Minister of Housing will please be seated.

MPP Stiles has moved opposition day number 1. All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Andrew, Jill	Gélinas, France	Schreiner, Mike
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gretzky, Lisa	Shamji, Adil
Bell, Jessica	Harden, Joel	Shaw, Sandy
Blais, Stephen	Hsu, Ted	Stiles, Marit
Bowman, Stephanie	Kernaghan, Terence	Tabuns, Peter
Burch, Jeff	McCrimmon, Karen	Taylor, Monique
Clancy, Aislinn	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	Pasma, Chandra	Vaugeois, Lise
French, Jennifer K.	Rakocevic, Tom	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
Gates, Wayne	Sattler, Peggy	

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Anand, Deepak	Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Rae, Matthew
Babikian, Aris	Ghamari, Goldie	Riddell, Brian
Bailey, Robert	Hardeman, Ernie	Romano, Ross
Barnes, Patrice	Harris, Mike	Sabawy, Sheref

Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Hogarth, Christine	Sandhu, Amarjot
Bouma, Will	Jones, Trevor	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Bresee, Ric	Jordan, John	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Byers, Rick	Kanapathi, Logan	Saunderson, Brian
Calandra, Paul	Kerzner, Michael S.	Scott, Laurie
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Leari, Anthony	Skelly, Donna
Cho, Stan	Lece, Stephen	Smith, Dave
Clark, Steve	Lumsden, Neil	Smith, Graydon
Coe, Lorne	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Todd
Crawford, Stephen	Martin, Robin	Surma, Kinga
Cuzzetto, Rudy	McCarthy, Todd J.	Thompson, Lisa M.
Dixon, Jess	Oosterhoff, Sam	Tibollo, Michael A.
Dowie, Andrew	Pang, Billy	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Downey, Doug	Parsa, Michael	Wai, Daisy
Dunlop, Jill	Piccini, David	Williams, Charmaine A.
Flack, Rob	Pierre, Natalie	
Ford, Michael D.	Quinn, Nolan	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The eyes are 29; the nays are 61.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negatived.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I will allow members to leave the chambers before proceeding.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ENHANCING ACCESS TO JUSTICE ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À AMÉLIORER L'ACCÈS À LA JUSTICE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 4, 2024, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 157, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to the courts and other justice matters / Projet de loi 157, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les tribunaux et d'autres questions relatives à la justice.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Further debate?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: It's always an honour to rise in this House to speak on behalf of the great people of Toronto Centre. Today we're debating government Bill 157, titled the Enhancing Access to Justice Act. However, it would be even more of an honour to rise to speak today if one out of the 11 motions that I had moved at committee would have been passed. Nevertheless, I'm here to speak about the bill that now comes back to the House for third reading.

As I mentioned in second reading, a bill can be passable and supportable even if it is not praiseworthy. That is largely what's before us today.

The Ontario NDP believes everyone in this province deserves equal access to justice. Years of Liberal and Conservative underfunding and budget cuts have left Ontario's court system in a crisis. There are unprecedented delays and a massive court backlog. There are unprecedented challenges for the judicial system that everyone has taken notice of. It now takes five years for a civil case to

reach trial, making Ontario the very worst place in Canada with such a shameful record.

Cases are not just confined to the civil courts. We are also seeing the criminal courts in shambles. We are seeing cases involving sexual assault of a minor, impaired driving and other serious, violent offences being thrown out because those cases are simply moving too slowly through the courts, not because of who's sitting on the bench but because the courts are underfunded.

Many court rooms are closed due to staffing shortages. Others are closed due to poor states of repair. Some are just literally falling apart. The Premier and his government have dramatically cut legal aid and have made it even harder for Ontarians to access justice. Instead of fixing the crisis, Conservatives are rewarding themselves with fancy new King's Counsel titles and appointing their unqualified insiders to oversee the judicial system and the tribunal system.

Now we have government Bill 157, which has 19 schedules, but still fails horribly to address some of the biggest challenges facing Ontario's justice system. In my remarks today, I'm going to speak about some of the motions I had put forward that would have had a very positive impact to strengthen this bill. Even by the adoption of one of these motions, this bill would have moved from passable to praiseworthy.

Let me begin by schedule 1. We had tried to move the government to have meaningful consultation between conflicted stakeholders in the sector. I'll explain. I had said that we needed to ensure that schedule 1 would be amended to allow for additional time for the government—namely, the Ministry of the Attorney General—to sit down with the Association of Architectural Technologists of Ontario and the Ontario Association of Architects over a long-standing dispute. This has been a significant challenge for the AATO.

I actually met with both of the significant stakeholders. They are not in agreement. They came before the committee to provide their deputation. It is unclear to me why the government chose not to meet with all the stakeholders that were going to be directly affected by this bill. In fact, the AATO was not only not consulted before the tabling of this bill; they received no notification whatsoever. They found out that a piece of legislation was moving forward that was going to greatly impact their sector without the government even talking to them or notifying them as a basic courtesy.

When I met with the AATO, they shared the following concerns. They said the OAA made an error when they went ahead and created their own class of architectural technologists by way of a policy, even though their title act, the Architects Act, meant that it had to be done by regulation. The AATO took the OAA to court, and the court ruled that the certificates that the OAA issued were void because it was formed illegally under that policy and not by regulation. This was a consent order.

But the Ministry of the Attorney General never consulted with the AATO. So we now have a government that's setting a precedent by rewarding bad behaviour.

And I would say, Speaker, this is a horrible precedent, and it's still unclear to me whether or not this schedule is going to be retroactive.

1540

I think we can all agree that regulatory bodies are entrusted with incredible powers, the powers of self-governance. Every single member of this House knows that self-governance is supposed to meet higher standards, not lower standards. And every self-regulating profession must prove to Ontarians every single year that they deserve the trust that they're given by this House, especially through a title act, that we invest in them and that we trust them to do the same thing. But that did not happen with the OAA. In a nutshell, what was uncovered in the courts was that the OAA knew what they were doing was wrong, but they still did it anyway. So they knowingly issued illegal licences, which they've been doing since 2003. A professional body that breaks trust is setting a very dangerous precedent. What's even more dangerous is this government is rewarding them by now legalizing what they did when they knew it was wrong.

I'm concerned that there should be a better process. I want to ensure that everyone has a say in the bill, especially schedule 1, as it affects them. There should be no reason why the government cannot take a pause to reconsider how they have treated the AATO by bringing them to the table and not bringing forward schedule 1 at this time, to make sure that they are going to be properly consulted in an in-person sit-down meeting, which they have not had as of yet. And that's all I wanted to do at the committee. I asked the government to adopt a motion that allowed for 30 days of consultation between the AATO and the OAA and any other stakeholders that this government deemed to be relevant and then to bring forward a solution that was going to find a path forward that would be able to make this situation right. The government voted that down.

I'm going to move on to schedule 6, Speaker. I proposed several amendments at the committee that would have significantly improved the justice system and made access to justice even more equitable and predictable for everyone involved. Unfortunately, those amendments were not approved.

My first amendment would have returned the selection process to the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee, known affectionately in the legal community as JAAC, to how it existed before the government meddled with it in 2021.

The Attorney General's influence over JAAC has dramatically increased by increasing the number of appointees that would be put in front of the Attorney General. There was no reason why it couldn't work the way it had already been set up. What we do know is that given, recently, the government has chosen to appoint two senior staff from the Premier's office to JAAC, serious concerns were raised about the impartiality of the judicial appointments process. But the government made it very clear, and the Premier made it very clear when he said he was going to "quadruple down" on his decisions.

Under this government, we have seen our court system spiral into chaos. We have seen serious cases being thrown out because of double-booking and a lack of resources. Survivors are forced to relive their trauma because of repeated delays. Instead of fixing the mess in their courts, the Attorney General is focused on using the majority that exists in this House to reward partisan patronage appointments, and he is eroding people's faith in the justice system.

Since being named as the critic of the Ministry of the Attorney General, I've had the honour of speaking with many people in the justice system, many people who work in the legal community, many people who are actually justices, as well as court staff. I am absolutely horrified that a 19-schedule bill entitled Enhancing Access to Justice Act doesn't actually make things better. It's actually an insult in many ways to Conservatives by creating an environment that taints their own brand.

Conservatives are asking themselves, "Who does this party represent?" Because certainly, smart Conservatives, Conservatives who believe in upholding the law, who believe in judicial fairness, are not liking what they see coming across from the government aisles.

What I have learned is that many of these people who have worked in the justice system for such a long time are very perplexed by what is happening. There are significant barriers to accessing justice that require fixes, and there are none of those fixes in the bill.

I want to quote solicitor Erin Durant's comments on the recent JAAC process: "What do David Peterson, Bob Rae, Mike Harris, Ernie Eves, Dalton McGuinty, Kathleen Wynne and" our current Premier "(until recently—2021) have in common? Likely the only thing?

"They used exactly the same process and procedure to appoint provincial judges." But with this Premier, this is no longer the case.

"Not all Ontario political parties appoint provincial judges based on who 'thinks like them.'

"They followed a non-partisan process specifically set up to be independent of government and avoid patronage."

The Premier "and his AG should be ashamed that they are tarnishing a system embraced by so many Premiers and AGs before them.

"How will they feel when they leave government and another political party pulls this crap?

"Do you want to be judged by a Conservative judge, a Liberal judge, an NDP judge or just a judge? In an increasingly divisive world, it is important that the judiciary remain neutral."

I also want to quote David Moscrop, who provided some very insightful commentary on this matter as well: "In a liberal democracy in which the rule of law constrains governments, the judiciary is meant to be a separate and independent branch that interprets and applies the law impartially. By expressly collapsing the wall between the executive and judicial branches," the Premier "risks turning the judicial-appointments process—and the judiciary itself—into a partisan circus that serves the government of the day and not the people of the province."

Moreover, his move incentivizes future governments to do the same, both to undo the partisan work of the last government and to protect against the appointments of future governments.

“A directly partisan appointments process will put public trust in the judiciary at risk. Why should anyone trust the rulings of a judge—however impartial or qualified they may be in reality—when the Premier is stacking the appointments committee and loudly proclaiming how judges should render judgments?”

“Under” the Premier’s “system, future judges may be, or may appear to be, functionaries of a political party rather than servants of the public. Why should anyone believe otherwise, whatever the truth may be? Why should someone who is accused of a crime trust the judgment of one of these judges? Why should Liberals or New Democrats trust the judiciary that emerges from” the Premier’s “system? Why shouldn’t they stack the courts themselves when they come into power, knowing the” Conservatives “will do the same? One quickly sees the race to the bottom here.”

This approach has shocked many people across the justice system. It’s extremely disappointing to see that this government did not choose to fix the crack in the justice system by actually adopting any of the motions I put forward.

The Premier’s former deputy chief of staff, Matthew Bondy, is now the chair of the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee, while his former director of stakeholder relations, Brock Vandrick, is now a member of the 13-person committee as of December. Not only are both men tied to the ruling Conservatives in Ontario, we’ve learned that recently they were both actively registered lobbyists actively lobbying this government on behalf of a range of clients, including a US gun manufacturer. How can Ontarians feel safer when a US gun lobbyist is chairing the committee that is tasked with recommending judicial appointments?

1550

It’s a very scary process, Speaker, which is why the legal community is up in arms, and they have not been silent; they have been speaking very loudly on this issue. The Advocates’ Society, which is a national organization representing lawyers who appear in court, told the Premier in a letter last Monday, prior to his comments at Queen’s Park, that they had very serious concerns with what he said on Friday: “Your comments—and the approach to judicial appointments that your comments convey—pose a substantial threat to the independence of Ontario’s judges from the government and to public confidence in the administration of justice in this province,” said their president, Dominique Hussey.

In a letter to the Premier, also copying the Attorney General, the Criminal Lawyers’ Association echoes the Advocates’ Society’s concerns. They tell the Premier that his comments “confirmed your government’s intentions to politicize the process.” This is what the Criminal Lawyers’ Association had to say: “Your ill-conceived public comments about appointing ‘like-minded’ judges will have the

unintended effect of tarnishing the integrity of your future appointments,” wrote their president, Boris Bytensky.

The Attorney General’s office has maintained that Mr. Bondy and Mr. Vandrick were appointed for their public policy expertise and volunteer activities. The Attorney General has raised the ire of legal groups before, in 2021, when he made those sweeping changes to the judicial committee, and he is also doubling down. Instead of providing sound legal advice to the Premier about his overreach, he’s backing him up.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I recognize the member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington on a point of order.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Pursuant to standing order 25(b)(i), I ask through you, Speaker, that the member from Toronto Centre return to the subject matter of the bill, please. The member’s remarks are not germane to the item currently being debated by this House, clearly. Thank you.

Mr. Wayne Gates: The transportation minister spoke for an hour, not talking to the bill at all.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): The member from Niagara Falls will come to order.

Mr. Wayne Gates: For an hour, you sat there and did nothing.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): The member from Niagara Falls will come to order.

I ask the member from Toronto Centre to speak to the bill. Thank you.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much, Speaker. I am speaking to the bill. This bill specifically talks about the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee.

The Federation of Ontario Law Associations, which represents 46 distinct and separate legal organizations, many of whom are sole practitioners or who work in smaller firms across this province, are known as the voice of the practising lawyers in Ontario. They issued a statement on behalf of those members that the Premier’s “comments at a press conference this morning, doubling down on the position that judges be appointed for political and not merit-based reasons, reflect a juvenile understanding of the role of an independent judiciary and erode confidence in the justice system. The justice system is not a playground for politicians to bully. The rule of law is upheld when judges are placed by merit, not by fiat.

“The Premier’s words set back much of the good work this government has done to modernize and improve the justice system in partnership with the courts and other legal stakeholders. They cast aspersions on all of the meritorious appointments this government has already made. They suggest that appointed judges were politically biased and take partisan positions that parallel” the Premier’s “policies, and worse, the appointees can’t even respond to the insinuation.

“All of this undermines public confidence in the administration of justice in a dangerous and anti-democratic way.

“By most accounts, Ontario has a thoughtful and pragmatic Attorney General.... It is disappointing that the Premier has—once again—placed the position of the Attorney General in an impossible situation within the legal community and forced him to defend dangerous comments about the role of the judiciary in Ontario.

“As a legal community and a profession duty-bound to uphold the rule of law, we denounce aspersions like this from being cast on the institutions of justice and the people that do that important work.

“These comments are irresponsible. They are harmful. And worse, they are contagious on the political right and pull apart at the threads of our democracy in a misleading and dangerous way. We call on the Premier to do better.”

That was a statement from the federation.

The bill is called Enhancing Access to Justice Act. What we’re seeing in the justice system right now is an under-resourcing of the courts. Somebody has to administer the justice. You’ve got to go to court. And what happens when those courts are underfunded? What happens when they’re dark and the lights are off, when there are no court reporters? We just don’t have enough staff, which is why I moved my motion to ask the Attorney General to develop a plan to recruit, hire and retain enough trial coordinators, court reporters, clerks, assistants, secretaries and other court support staff to basically keep the courtrooms open and lit. The government’s failure to properly resource courtrooms has led to courtroom closures and the dismissal of serious criminal cases due to unconstitutional delays.

During the committee, the Attorney General said that the ministry had addressed the issues at a downtown courtroom. But clearly, that wasn’t good enough, because if any member walks into that courtroom today—I guarantee you, you will see the building largely empty and those courtrooms not carrying out the business of Ontario.

There are many stories about the court system that need to come forward, and I want to share some of those stories. Victims who have experienced horrendous harm are now being revictimized by the government and their failing court systems.

I want to share the story of Emily. Emily is a young woman who was sexually assaulted in her home. She bravely took her rapist to court, despite knowing how difficult it would be, only to have her case delayed again and again because of the closed courtrooms, until it was thrown out. Her case was thrown out because it had passed the 18-month constitutional timeline.

I want you to imagine, Speaker, for a moment, someone experiencing an indescribable amount of violence and violation. That individual could be someone you know. They go to the police, they have a lawyer take their testimony, and then they work through the courts to seek justice because that’s what they are supposed to do. All the while, they have to tell their story and they’re reliving the harm. Then their case gets thrown out and they never ever get their day in court.

Survivors have to be so brave in Ontario, and Emily was brave. She did everything she was supposed to do, and she

got penalized. She was punished. And there is no reason why Emily’s case was thrown out—it’s not because she didn’t have a solid case, because she did; it’s not because the police didn’t lay charges, because they did. Emily’s case was thrown out because of this government’s underfunding of the courts. We have seen this happen time and time again, and the cases that are being thrown out are very serious. It’s not because of who’s sitting on the bench. That’s what this government wants you to believe—that they need to get judges who are tougher on crime. But this government hasn’t been smarter on crime. Cases are being thrown out because of the government’s incompetence. And they haven’t fixed the judiciary. They haven’t fixed the criminal justice system.

I want to share another story. This is a story that is quite gut-wrenching. Cait, a woman who came to me with her story—her story was so horrendous that I was left speechless. Cait was brutally beaten and forcefully confined by her then-partner in Toronto. She told me that she nearly died. During the assault, she was able to call for help and use her cellphone and laptop to capture pictures and videos of the assault. A team of police officers arrived at her home and caught her assailant red-handed in the act. Their testimony and the photo and video evidence meant that the police told Cait that this was an open-and-shut case. They could pretty much lock the guy away—getting tough on crime. “The person who did this would be convicted” is what the police said to her.

1600

To recover from her extensive injuries, Cait was sent to Sunnybrook Hospital, during which time her former partner turned himself in and was automatically charged with three serious offences. Once Cait gave her statement, two more charges were laid. At one point, a charge of attempted murder was even being considered.

Speaker, an error was made in her case. The courts were backed up and all the charges were stayed due to those delays. She was told that her case wasn’t a priority. She was given a court date, but it was beyond the 18-month time limit. Cait noticed this and asked that her court date be moved up, but it wasn’t. No one from the court kept her informed until she was told that the trial had been cancelled. Cait never got her day in court. She did not get a trial, despite the violent nature of what happened to her and a pile of evidence. Remember, the police caught him red-handed. Video evidence and photographic evidence was there. None of this is Cait’s fault—that her trial was delayed and eventually the charges tossed.

The trial between the accused and the crown is why Cait is a victim a second time. The crown and the entire court failed her because they couldn’t get to court in time.

We need to fix the courts so Cait and the many Caits who are out there will never have this happen to them again.

My next motion was about fixing the legal aid crisis in Ontario. My motion would have required the Attorney General to develop a plan to increase current legal aid funding, expand legal services covered by legal aid certificates, increase legal aid financial thresholds and improve Legal Aid Ontario’s fee structure.

During committee, the Attorney General said, “We can either push uphill and pretend that we’re going to get rid of self-reps”—meaning self-represented cases—“and only have people represented by lawyers, or we can face reality and build the system for the user who’s here today, and that’s what we’re doing.” Speaker, it sounds like the Attorney General has given up.

His comments would suggest that the government isn’t interested in giving everyone the option of having legal representation if they want it. In fact, we all know that self-representation leads to increased court delays and inefficiencies. Despite repeated calls for more and improved legal aid from legal stakeholders and the judiciary, this government went ahead and cut legal aid funding to the tune of \$133 million in 2019—30% just flat out cut. The government has now underspent by \$103 million in this last year’s budget. So even when the money is allocated, it’s not spent. What are you holding it for? The system is in crisis. We saw a 26% underspending on top of the 30% in 2019.

I want to remind everyone in the House that the current financial threshold for a single applicant without dependents, in order for them to access a legal aid certificate, is \$18,795 in gross income. If you make a penny more than that, you don’t get legal aid. We know this is a very expensive province to live in, and one of the most expensive in the country. We also know that many people do not meet the legal aid requirements, which means that they’re forced to self-represent. And yet, we have an Attorney General speaking at committee who thinks people are there representing themselves because they want to be. No. The Attorney General is wrong. People can’t get access to legal representation. That’s why they’re representing themselves. They can’t afford it.

Even the government, both provincially and federally, during COVID, recognized that a basic annual income should be at least \$24,000—\$2,000 a month—and yet the legal aid requirement is that you make \$18,797. Clearly, that is a problem.

We know that people denied access to justice—when they don’t have legal representation, it’s going to be more costly, and it means that those who don’t have and can’t afford expensive lawyers are not going to get any lawyers. And guess what? They’re not going to get access to justice. They’re not going to get anywhere close to a sliver of what justice could look like. The justice system is only going to work for those who are wealthy, those who are pedalling special interests. It’s not going to work for the average Ontarian.

I want to share the words of Michael Luba, a criminal lawyer who actually made a very eloquent argument in 2022 on why legal aid funding should be increased, after the major cuts in 2019 by the government. Ultimately, increasing funding in the legal aid program saves the province money. The Legal Aid Ontario program provides lawyers at no charge for people who earn less than a certain amount of money—I spoke about that. “This risk to liberty policy guarantees service” is extended to the poorest and most at-risk people in our province. People

denied legal service under the policy end up self-representing, delaying proceedings, and thereby costing the system far more. By extension, the money which should have been in the legal aid program would actually save the court system more money. It’s good for business. It’s not just good for access to justice. It’s actually good business sense. This matters because people with criminal records who turn to crime will, if caught, require legal aid services in the future. When a court considers what sentence to impose on a convicted person, it reviews a person’s criminal record. A bad record can escalate a sentence. It follows that a person avoidably convicted of a criminal offence is more likely to have their liberty at risk, and to receive Legal Aid Ontario representation, if convicted of a subsequent offence. In other words, Legal Aid Ontario may avoid the cost of representing someone at the first instance under the risk to liberty policy but could still end up paying the next time around.

Speaker, it costs \$6,000 to \$10,000 per month to keep someone in prison and possibly hundreds of thousands more per year if they’re homeless after their release. In the city of Toronto, it costs about \$42,000 to provide some type of shelter care for people who are experiencing homelessness. Providing legal aid funding is good business. You pay up now; you’re going to save a heck of a lot more down the road.

Another motion that I moved was to ask the Attorney General to develop a plan to increase the amount of funding to Ontario’s rape crisis centres and sexual support centres and domestic violence support centres.

In 2022, this government stopped renewing an annual multi-million dollar funding boost to rape crisis and sexual assault support centres. This was something that my predecessor, Suze Morrison, fought hard to reinstate as the critic for women’s issues. This no-longer-existent million-dollar boost was critical, and now its absence is deeply felt. The million dollars was split between 42 crisis centres across the province that are already overwhelmed by the demand of service. On average, the centres would receive just under \$24,000 from this program while delivering critical life-saving work.

1610

As you can imagine, many sexual assault and rape crisis centres are seeing the longest wait times they’ve ever experienced in the history of their centres. They’re desperately needing more funding for more staff. The centre staff warn that wait times act as a deterrent for victims. When they know they can’t get service, they don’t go to them, and they don’t get served. It doesn’t mean that the crime didn’t happen. They just don’t get the help.

People are reaching out for support from these organizations, and they need this government to act compassionately. What’s the point of having a bill entitled Enhancing Access to Justice Act when you’re not actually funding the system and the wheels of justice?

In 2022, what we learned from Statistics Canada is what survivors and many working in the sector to end gender-based violence already know: that sexual assault in Canada is increasing and alarmingly with no end in sight. It’s an epidemic.

The rate of police-reported sexual assault has reached its highest levels since 1996, and yet we know only 6% of those sexual assaults are ever reported to the police. They may not go to the police, but they will go to a rape crisis centre or a sexual assault centre. Speaker, 81% of Ontario's sexual assault support centres saw an increase in calls during the pandemic, and that has not eased up.

We hear this: Many of these centres rely on one-time grants that they need to apply to each year, often requiring lengthy and time-consuming applications, charitable fundraising and other cuts to their programs if the fundraising goals are not met. None of these activities make their programs better. They simply keep the doors open and the lights on. They pay the underpaid counsellor to help hundreds of victims and survivors who are walking through their door.

Naomi Martey, sexual violence counsellor and advocate at the Toronto Rape Crisis Centre/Multicultural Women Against Rape centre, told me, "Despite an increasing city population and a year-after-year increase in reported sexual assault, the rape crisis centre has only seen a real-dollar increase of \$5,800/year from the province over the last decade." You don't value their work. We don't value their work in this House. This government does not value their work.

We need to see this government invest in services that will support survivors—and not just talking about giving them access to courts so they can sue their abuser in court. That will take five years to get to a civil hearing, when you can actually help survivors right now. This government can help survivors right now by ensuring that they adequately fund rape crisis centres and victim support centres.

Speaking of victim support programs, the government also voted down my motion—and I moved 11 motions, so it's going to take a little time to get through; so I want you to know what you are voting for—that would have required the Attorney General to develop a plan to increase the amount of compensation available to victims under the Victim Quick Response Program+; extend the program's deadlines; make the program accessible to victims of historical crimes; and make the program available to all eligible victims, regardless of their access to other publicly funded programs. We heard from advocates to end gender-based violence that they needed these changes. We heard that the court system and the program was simply not doing enough. But why is it not doing enough?

The Ford government eliminated a previous program in 2019—it was called the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, where victims could access up to \$30,000, including a maximum of \$5,000 for pain and suffering. That was scrapped when this government cancelled it and replaced it with the Victim Quick Response Program+. The amount of funding under the VQRP+ is dramatically less than what was available under the criminal injuries compensation program. In the majority of cases, the victims can now access a maximum of \$1,000. From \$30,000 under the previous program, now victims will get

\$1,000—and it takes months, because, again, there's a wait-list. Under this government, there are long lineups for every type of publicly funded service.

Victims in Ontario are not being supported by this government despite the rhetoric that we heard.

By supporting these simple motions that I put forward, you would truly demonstrate that the government members cared about survivors, and we would see survivors rallying around this government's bill—but they're not; not really. They're not there. They were keen on the motions, though.

The Victims' Bill of Rights, schedule 18: I also moved several motions to strengthen this bill, based directly on the submissions from the deputants. I moved that the Victims' Bill of Rights would create a category to ensure the presumption of emotional distress in a civil trial if a victim of a crime—was motivated by hate. This amendment, which I moved, was requested by the Centre for Israeli and Jewish Affairs. We know that instances of hate, especially motivated by anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia, anti-Black racism are all on the rise in Ontario. Given this government's tough talk on addressing the alarming rise of anti-Semitism and other forms of hate directed at religious groups, I was absolutely perplexed as to why the government members voted against a reasonable recommendation from CIJA. It is logical to believe that if a crime was committed against you that was, in whole or in part, motivated by hate, it would cause you emotional distress. I can't imagine a situation in which that wouldn't be deeply disturbing and cause a person to fear for their safety and the safety of their loved ones on an ongoing basis. The government voted that down.

The government also voted down a second category that I put forward, which is victims of terrorism offences, as recommended by the Council for a Secure Canada. The Council for a Secure Canada is a non-partisan institute dedicated to combatting terrorism, extremism and related threats by creating innovative laws, policies and alliances. They wanted to ensure that terror victims would also be presumed to have emotional distress—again, a logical recommendation.

We know that when we saw the London family struck down by a motor vehicle motivated by hate, it would be important, because it's also known as an act of terror, that the laws would protect people like the family who was killed, and doing everything we can to strengthen the law while we have a bill in front of us to ensure that we capture those individuals is important. But the government did not support that.

1620

There are some things in this bill, especially a couple of amendments, that I want to note, because I think it's important for us to talk about what did happen. In schedule 18, despite the government striking down my motions and the motions of the independent member, they did move two motions that I thought were very important for us to

note, because I was prepared to move them myself, because they listened to some deputants, but not all.

The two amendments that the government moved would have ensured that the Victims' Bill of Rights would create a presumption of emotional distress in a civil trial if the crime is of a sexual nature or if the crime is for or involves a sexual purpose. It removes the requirement that the victim must be under the age of 18 or a person living with a disability at the time of the crime, which was very good because it didn't cover people over 18, and now it does. Now the bill covers everybody.

Also, it was a very peculiar draft of the first bill that you had to be living with a disability at the time in order for there to be a presumption of emotional stress. I thank the lawyers on behalf of Jellinek Ellis Gluckstein, a firm that exclusively represents survivors of sexual assault and historical sexual child abuse, because they brought forward their expertise and they were instrumental in making sure that that motion, that portion of schedule 18, was going to be strengthened.

That's what we want to see at committee: We want to see amendments coming forward from opposition, government and independent members to address the gaps in legislation. We're never going to get it right at first draft; that's why we send it out to committee for consultation. We want to hear from the community and what they have to say. Especially a bill like this, which dramatically affects the legal community. We want to hear from them, and we want to then take action, meaningful action, so that they know that we heard them and that we are able to respond to them in an intelligent manner that they deserve.

It's critically important that a bill entitled Enhancing Access to Justice does that, but we haven't seen as much work in this bill as needed. I think that's largely because there is a level of dogma, an absolute level of dogma, in the government's approach to legislation, governance and law making.

Good ideas will come from all sides of the aisle. My dad told me that. He was someone who sailed the seas for 12 years as a naval officer, and this was at a time when countries would send treaties and important international documents on the Queen's naval ships. He always taught me that we have to listen and we have to learn from each other. There was no reason why we couldn't do better at the committee to ensure that a bill as large as this, with 19 schedules, didn't have a better result for Ontarians.

I am so perplexed by the number of announcements that this government will make on certain matters, but something as important as an institution of our democracy, the court system which we rely on, doesn't get the attention and the money that it deserves. And Speaker, so many people in Ontario are relying on us to fix the broken court system: Victims who are scared to walk the streets in their community again because their abuser is still out, not because of the judge who's sitting on the bench, but because the trial was thrown out because of endless delays. And it is so insulting to hear the Premier talk about how the judiciary needs to reflect his values, because that's the

way the system works, right? "I win; I get to appoint whoever the heck I want." No, that's not how it works. And it's absolutely shocking that the Premier doesn't understand that, because I can tell you that the fixes to our criminal and civil justice system are right before our very eyes.

The people who came forward to speak to us at committee offered us their very best advice. At any given time, when we wear purple in this House to signal, to gesture, that we care about ending gender-based violence, but then do very little to nothing to support the survivors, why should we bother wearing the scarves? It's so insulting to them, Speaker, because what they want is justice: victims and survivors. Victims and survivors deserve access to justice and, regrettably, this time in Ontario is one of the darkest moments for victims of violent crimes. They're not seeing and getting their day in court. No, Speaker, that is not happening.

Survivors of gender-based violence, survivors of intimate partner violence, survivors of gun violence, survivors of human trafficking, survivors of impaired driving, survivors of assault and violent bullying, survivors of harassment: They're not getting their day in court, and I think, when Ontarians see the bigger picture of who's actually getting access to justice and who's not, and when they see the number of cases that have been thrown out under this government's watch—violent offenders—they're not going to be screaming for judges that were appointed by the government because they happened to share political values. They're going to be screaming that this government failed to fix the court system. And Speaker, that is the biggest problem we have right now in the justice system. The tribunals are not working. We've got record backlogs. The civil courts are not working. The criminal courts are not working. Everyone is stuck. They're stuck, Speaker.

It is incredibly demoralizing for the families and the survivors and the victims when this government is giving them recycled talking points. And when they hear the government rise during question period and deflect very honest concerns that people are raising, you insult them again. But it's not even just the fact that it's rude, because it is, Speaker. It's dismissive, for sure. We are revictimizing them over and over and over again.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks, a bill can be passable, but it's not praiseworthy. And when this bill passes—and it will because we know the government controls the House; it's got a supermajority—they're going to walk over to the Attorney General and probably to the Solicitor General, they're going to slap each other on the back and they're going to give themselves a handshake. But I don't think the rest of Ontario is applauding this government at all, and I know for certain that survivors and victims of violent crime are not going to be applauding this government.

1630

So we have a bill before us that has 19 schedules, where we see the Attorney General take the side of one group—

and this is the OAA over the AATO—despite the fact that there was all sorts of confusion and we know that there’s unfairness and there was the broken trust by regulatory bodies. We saw the government unwilling to listen, unwilling to consult. That same pattern of behaviour—the one that is unwilling to listen, refusing to listen, refusing to consult—is how the government meets survivors and victims of sexual violence.

Our justice system is in crisis, Speaker. There is no doubt about it. The defence lawyers are talking about it. The crown attorneys are talking about it. Definitely, the judiciary is not staying silent anymore. The courts are desperately underfunded. They are understaffed. Survivors of sexual violence are watching their cases collapse unavoidably due to delays, and those same survivors are on the wait-list for services from this government and from local organizations, waiting and languishing, not getting the services that they need, being let down, once again, by this government.

Legal aid in Ontario is massively underfunded. The legal aid clinics are teetering on the verge of collapse. Speaker, I challenge any of the members to go talk to a clinic lawyer and ask them about their caseload. You ask them about whether or not they’re able to support the individuals who walk through their door, who have a legitimate case, but they don’t have money—you ask them, “What can this government do to fix the problem?” And they’ll tell you really clearly: “Fix and fund Legal Aid Ontario,” which we know is actually costing our system, as I’ve spoken about even more.

People are getting tired and they’re leaving. In some ways, maybe that’s what the government wants: They want to see the legal aid system collapse. And the poor, the most vulnerable, the ones against whom the hand on the scale is already tipped against, they will not have any access to justice. They won’t even bother. Why would they? The system is already rigged against them.

The government had a chance to fix the victim support programs that are underfunded. They had a chance to meet the needs of victims and survivors, but they haven’t done that through this bill. They had a chance to properly resource local organizations that are doing the hard work on the ground, but they chose not to. They had a chance—this government—to further improve the Victims’ Bill of Rights by expanding the categories to include survivors and victims of acts of terror and hate crimes, and this government hasn’t been able to do that.

Speaker, it’s so hard to debate a bill when the bill itself doesn’t live up to the title of the bill. I feel like half the time in this House the title of the bills—which we know is sort of the wrapping paper and the bow on top of the bills—is just simply a slogan. I’ve seen this before—I’ve seen this before—but the people of Ontario deserve more than a slogan.

The people of Ontario deserve a government that’s willing to listen and work hard to fix the problems that we have. This is not a laughing matter. This is one of the most serious matters before the House and our justice system,

and this government is failing them miserably. Every single Ontarian deserves to trust their justice system, but that is not what they’re going to get with this government.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I heard the member speak about legal aid, and of course, when it comes to legal aid certificates, if a person is charged with an offence by which the prosecutor is seeking a term of jail, whether it’s long or short, that person will get a legal aid certificate and a free lawyer, provided they qualify with respect to the financing.

My question to the member is this: Sometimes somebody gets a legal aid certificate and they use that certificate, and there’s a result in the court and then the person is charged with another offence and they get another legal aid certificate, and they use that certificate and that matter is dispensed by the court. And then, a while later, the person is charged with another offence and they get another legal aid certificate and it goes on and on and on. These people are known as rounders.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: And so my question to the member is this: How many legal aid certificates should a person be entitled to?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I don’t think the member across is being serious. Anyone who needs a lawyer should be able to obtain a lawyer. This is what we are talking about when it comes to the scales of justice. It shouldn’t be a coupon that you ration.

I do not know exactly where you’re going with that question, but I can tell you this: The most vulnerable in our society, who are largely Black and Indigenous, are overrepresented in the detention centres and in the jails. And everybody, regardless of who they are, deserves access to legal representation.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to begin by thanking the member for Toronto Centre for their important work on this bill and for the 11 efforts that you made to try to make the bill better, all of which were rejected. And I want to ask a bigger-picture question; you can fill in as you like, but I struggle to understand why the members opposite are prepared to waste hundreds of millions—potentially billions—of dollars warehousing poor and marginalized people, people needing mental health needs, people needing addictions needs. In some cases, people have lost their spirit and their self. We’re gridlocking our courts; we’re warehousing folks in prisons; we’re putting our first responders in terrible positions and we’re spending an incredible amount of money in Ontario when we could actually be doing what you suggested in your motions: preventatively, proactively trying to figure out a path to wellness for people.

Why is the government putting forward gimmicky measures like this and not trying to save people their dignity and the province money?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much. To question this government's motive—where do I begin? The government is always interested in building super-jails. We know that the detention centres and the jails are now overcrowded. Human rights are being violated in jails. We just have to take a look at what happened to Soleiman Faqiri, a man who was beaten literally to death while in custody.

And so we have a lot of work to do in Ontario, but it starts with recognizing that there's a problem and then smartly diverting the funds away from punishing people, but also to build a pathway to restorative justice. Because if someone is suffering from mental health or is sleeping rough on the streets, they don't deserve jail, Speaker. They deserve access to health care and they deserve housing and shelter.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Ted Hsu: My question is about schedule 12 and justices of the peace. This schedule amends the Justices of the Peace Act so that the Justices of the Peace Appointments Advisory Committee is no longer required to include statistics on the cultural identity of candidates for appointment as justices of the peace.

I'm just wondering if my honourable colleague has anything to say about whether or not the justices of the peace in Ontario reflect the diversity of the user community—if she has any thoughts on that.

1640

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: To the member, thank you for your question. The removal of cultural identities with respect to the piece around statistics on the justice of the peace appointments process was very perplexing.

When asked by members on the independent benches, as well as by opposition, why the government was doing this, the government couldn't really give a straightforward answer. And yet we know that the Canadian Civil Liberties Association has flagged this as a problem, that you should leave that category in there because it allows us to take a look at who is getting appointed to the justice of the peace system, as well as even to the judiciary. It allows us to actually verify whether or not the government is diversifying their benches, which is what they claim they were doing.

So I would with say that there's quite a number of people who were concerned that that was being struck out, and I don't know the government's motivation for doing that. And the government never provided a solid, sound, logical answer.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I sit on the justice policy committee with the member opposite, and she knows full well during the debates and hearings at the standing committee on the eligibility that there's two aspects to the Victims' Bill of Rights. One is to expand the number or

types of crime that are enumerated under the regulations to allow the claims to go forward, and the other is a smaller subset which requires the presumption of emotional distress and harm. But the fact that one list is smaller than the other does not prevent the others from claiming emotional distress; it requires them to prove it. As we know, in hate crimes and terrorism crimes, it can include property damage as opposed to emotional distress under the criminal code, so it requires the victim to prove the emotional distress, only in those cases.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Sorry, Speaker, there was no question in that. But I understand you wanted to provide a comment.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Let me be clear that we on this side of the House do not believe that might makes right, because that's what happens in totalitarian regimes. That's why this government's action when it comes to our judicial system, their abuse of power, is so chilling. I mean, the Premier says he wants like-minded judges. That's shocking. He has also said that Parliament is supreme. So I imagine that that means that he thinks he is supreme. That is the absolute defining definition of might makes right.

Pope Francis said that might makes right is responsible for "immense inequality, injustice and acts of violence."

So my question to the member: This is what this bill seems to me. It's another action on the part of this government to consolidate power, to show that they have the might, and they think that that makes them right, but they're ruining our judicial system in this province. Do you agree?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I would agree. And not only do I agree with your statement, I think it's absolutely shameful that we have an opportunity to improve the justice system right here with this legislation and the government is not being serious about doing that work.

I think we have a very big problem in Ontario with crowded detention centres, crowded jails, empty courtrooms, blackened and dark courtrooms, and victims falling further to revictimization. I think this is a problem that the government should be addressing and none of that is being addressed in this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: I thought the question was implicit in the comment. But I would ask the member opposite to agree that the crimes have been expanded, the enumerated crimes are being expanded under the regulation so victims of hate crimes and victims from terrorism can now make claims under the Victims' Bill of Rights. Yes or no?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: You know, it's critically important for us—

Interjections.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Speaker, I'm trying to answer the question. I've got some people heckling me.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Comments through the Chair, please. The House will come to order. The member has the floor.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much, Speaker. When we have subject matter experts appear before the committee, providing advice on how to improve a bill, we at the committee listen. Some of us listen. And taking action to actually roll that out so that we can actually reflect their comments into an amendment was my job. So absolutely, I stand by the fact that the Victims' Bill of Rights could be and should be expanded to ensure that victims of acts of terror and hate crimes should have also been included under the presumption of emotional stress.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): Further debate?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: After that riveting debate on the opposition motion this morning, it seems to have taken a toll on the House. It's a lot quieter in here now.

I'm very pleased to rise in the House this afternoon on behalf of the residents of Simcoe–Grey to speak to the third reading of the Enhancing Access to Justice Act, Bill 157, a bill that will, if passed, improve access to justice, enhance community safety and modernize the justice system for all Ontarians. I want to start my comments by thanking the Attorney General and the Solicitor General for their remarks this morning and their hard work on bringing this important legislation forward.

Speaker, as we've heard in this debate, the government is committed to protecting Ontarians and ensuring that the people of Ontario have the right to work, live, play and enjoy family time in a safe community. As a result of the work of the Solicitor General in the enforcing sector and the Attorney General in the justice sector, this bill is part of our absolute commitment to strengthen that right.

This legislation, if passed, will do the following:

- improve community safety;
- expand and enhance the process for victims of crime to get financial compensation for emotional distress from the convicted offender who harmed them;
- shield our youth from cannabis exposure at a young age;
- streamline court and government procedures to ensure that our courts can keep pace with Ontario's rapidly growing population and the resulting pressures that that growth poses; and
- make important changes to legislation like the Courts of Justice Act, Execution Act, Provincial Offences Act, Land Titles Act, Juries Act and the Architects Act.

The Attorney General and the Solicitor General both spoke at length this morning about many aspects of this legislation that will improve life for Ontarians. I intend to cover in my comments this afternoon two aspects of those, the first being the changes to the Victims' Bill of Rights Act, 1995, and changes to the Architects Act.

By way of context, Speaker, I'd like to just say the following: Ontario is the fastest-growing jurisdiction in Canada and, in fact, North America. Our beautiful

province is home to 15 million people, which translates to almost 40% of Canada's population of 40 million. And we know that our province will continue to grow dramatically under the federal government's current immigration target of 500,000 new Canadians annually. In fact, we know that in 2023 alone, 500,000 new Canadians chose to call Ontario home.

Ontario's population is almost twice that of Quebec and three times that of British Columbia, the next largest common-law province. Geographically, we are the third-largest province. These attributes combined make service delivery in our judicial system both complex and challenging.

We are growing at an unprecedented rate, and that growth is putting intense pressure on our provincial systems. We know this from our discussions in this House on housing, on health care, on education and on law enforcement and our judicial system. It requires us to be vigilant and responsive to these pressures. This legislation is an important step and a continuation of work that started in 2019 to be sure that our processes and our systems are sensitive to the needs of hard-working Ontarians and enhance and improve our law enforcement and judicial systems to serve and protect Ontarians.

Speaker, we know that acts of terrorism, auto theft, human trafficking and hate-related crimes, including those that target clergy and places of worship, can have devastating impacts on individuals, on congregations and on our communities. This legislation will add new crimes to the regulations under the Victims' Bill of Rights Act: the list of crimes that give rise to a civil cause of action for the victims of those crimes—I spoke of that in my question to the member opposite; there are two categories—and to the list of crimes in which a presumption of emotional distress will be made. We are adding terrorism, human trafficking, hate-related crimes and auto theft to those crimes which give rise to a civil action. We have also expanded, through the regulations, the types of crimes where a presumption of emotional distress will be made in those civil actions.

In addition, Speaker, the legislative changes in Bill 157 will amend the Victims' Bill of Rights to expand the list of crimes for which the courts can presume emotional distress, as I said. This will expedite the process and prevent the revictimization of victims of those crimes when seeking civil compensation from the convicted offenders.

Currently, Madam Speaker, only victims of assaults by their spouses and victims of sexual assault or attempted sexual assault are afforded the presumption of emotional distress under the Victims' Bill of Rights. The proposed changes will expand this list to include victims of human trafficking, victims of certain sexual offences involving minors or persons with disabilities, and victims of the distribution of voyeuristic recordings or intimate photos without consent. These important changes are reflective of and responsive to the severe and devastating harms that these enumerated crimes will cause to their victims.

1650

We see it in Ontario, where there is a proliferation of crimes involving the online distribution of voyeuristic recordings and intimate photos. We all know the tragic story of 17-year-old Amanda Todd, who died by suicide in 2012 because of online harassment and sextortion. These terrible crimes continue, and there are many stories, unfortunately; I recently read of a story involving a 12-year-old boy. We need to address these concerns and we need to provide these victims with civil remedies where the presumption of emotional harm is made.

We see that, as well, in another intensely personal and egregious crime: human trafficking. We know this past fall, this House passed an all-House private member's motion to release victims of human trafficking from their debts as a way to help, release and rehabilitate these victims and allow them to move forward. This ability to seek civil compensation from their convicted offender is another chance to do that.

Switching gears, Speaker, I'd like to speak about the proposed changes to the Architects Act to establish a limited licence and provide regulation-making authority for the Ontario Association of Architects. This will establish a limited class of licences that they were issuing for 20 years; we found, as a result of May 2023 Ontario Superior Court decision, that they did not have that authority. Let's be very clear: The limited licence grants the registrants enhanced scope of practice—the scope of practice they would not have under the association of architectural technologists, which is similar to a BCIN—and allows them to design a single-family detached home. The enhanced scope that you would have under the Ontario architects' association's limited licence would allow the registrants to design fourplexes, restaurants and smaller commercial buildings, which is distinctly different from what they would have if they were a member of the architectural technologists' association.

This is an important distinction, and as we heard at committee, it fills a very important gap of affordability. Developers planning a fourplex, a restaurant or a small commercial business can now find a more price-conscious

access to service, where they can have their building designed and they can move forward with the project without incurring the cost of having a fully licensed architect. In doing so, they will have enhanced insurance coverage, there will be a complaints process and there will be access for them to have their complaints heard by the regulatory body, none of which existed through the association of architectural technologists.

These changes, Speaker, are important to getting the homes built, the houses built and the development built to support our goal of building 1.5 million new homes across this province by 2030, and it's an important point in making sure that our development can proceed in an economically feasible way.

I'd also like to talk about some of the investments that we have made across this province since 2018. I was present for the opening of the new courthouse in Kenora, Ontario, which was a joint project with the local First Nations bands. They own the property; we developed the building and it has wraparound services that will help to reduce recidivism and provides Gladue courts, as per the Supreme Court decision to have restorative justice in our Native communities.

We have just recently opened a new courthouse in Toronto. We have expanded the courthouse in Brampton. We are investing \$6 million to help turn the 1,500 part-time employees in the court services to full-time employees, so that we can make sure that actions in the court proceed in a timely and efficient manner. We know from the pandemic that we've had challenges and we heard the Attorney General this morning speak about the digitization and the efforts being made to make sure that across this province we have access to digitized documents so court filings can be made anywhere.

These are massive investments that this government is making to make sure that access to justice in this province happens faster, more efficiently and comes out with good outcomes.

And with that, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Essex, and I will cede my time to him.

Report continues in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Edith Dumont, OOnt
Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative: Hon. / L'hon. Ted Arnott
Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day
Deputy Clerk / Sous-Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Julia Douglas, Meghan Stenson,
Christopher Tyrell, Wai Lam (William) Wong
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Tim McGough

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Anand, Deepak (PC)	Mississauga—Malton	
Andrew, Jill (NDP)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
Arnott, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Barnes, Patrice (PC)	Ajax	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Begum, Doly (NDP)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC)	Pickering—Uxbridge	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Bowman, Stephanie (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Brady, Bobbi Ann (IND)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Bresee, Ric (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
Byers, Rick (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	
Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement Minister of Legislative Affairs / Ministre des Affaires législatives
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough North / Scarborough- Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Clancy, Aislinn (GRN)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds— Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Crawford, Stephen (PC)	Oakville	
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Dixon, Jess (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Dowie, Andrew (PC)	Windsor—Tecumseh	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
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	