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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 5 March 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 5 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

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 Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Speaker, it's an honour to be here before you today and speak on behalf of third reading to the Enhancing Access to Justice Act. Our government commends itself for successfully bringing in the Community Safety and Policing Act because—before I go too much farther, I'm sharing my time with the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Our government commends itself for successfully bringing in the Community Safety and Policing Act because it truly does benefit the police who serve Ontario and the people of all walks of life in this province. We know this monumental legislation will be a living document and therefore be something that will adapt to policing through generations.

Although it is not perfect, the Enhancing Access to Justice Act we are vouching for today will amend some of the gaps and loopholes that can be found within the CSPA. Some of these changes will revolutionize the level of public safety in such a positive way that Ontarians will be able to see immediate change in their communities. This act, if passed, is the key to CSPA's success.

For example, the fire marshal changes: The act aims to amend the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997. In almost 30 years, this legislation has not been touched, until now. We are taking key issues that fire stakeholders have been advocating for and making it happen. Under Premier Ford and the Solicitor General's leadership, we are taking safety to a new level.

It is no secret that Ontario has undergone significant changes over time, necessitating adaptations, and legisla-

tion needs to address new challenges. Evolving issues and shifting circumstances underscore the need for legislation to remain pertinent and efficient in addressing contemporary fire-related needs and realities. Without doing so, we put ourselves in an outdated critical circumstance where old legislation does not correlate with current events.

We are devising a new mechanism to enhance enforcement and compliance with the act and its regulations. There exists a deficiency in the array of enforcement tools available under the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997, and our government is acting. The main objective is to bridge this gap by introducing new tools to promote adherence to the act and its regulations.

Many Ontario statutes, such as the Highway Traffic Act and the Municipal Act, 2001, incorporate administrative monetary penalties, otherwise known as AMPs, to incentive compliance. AMP frameworks allow authorized individuals to levy monetary penalties for violations of requirements outlined in an act, regulation or bylaw.

What is interesting is that an authorized individual also may issue an AMP upon discovering a violation. This is something that will bring more public safety into effect, because we can respond to violations in real time. AMPs are viable as they foster compliance without necessitating the initiation of legal proceedings. Enhancing access to justice is just that, without backing up our courts and going through an entire lengthy process to ensure that the violation is reprimanded.

Currently, there are no provisions whatsoever for an AMP framework under the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997. This needs to change because of the vital necessity of AMPs to partake in fire situations. I am proud to say that we have listened. The Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs and other stakeholders who long advocated for such a compliance tool will be getting this through the Enhancing Access to Justice Act, if this bill is passed.

In response to sector feedback, Bill 157 and this amendment to the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997, enables future development with fire stakeholders, furthering public safety even more so. We need to be listening to those who do this job every day, and our government knows how much value our front line adds to keeping Ontario safe.

This amendment furthers our commitment that the government will engage in consultations with municipalities regarding this AMP framework. This is an opportunity to discuss the different avenues and opportunities that AMPs can have for every specific region. These include identifying violations for which administrative monetary penalties could be issued; determining the penalty amounts and

ranges; enforcement and collection procedures, including administration in unincorporated Ontario; and establishing a framework for assessing associated impacts during the regulatory process.

The proposed amendment does not alter existing requirements under the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997. Changes can have unforeseen consequences, potentially leading to unintended outcomes or negative impacts. By not altering the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997, our government mitigates the risk of these unintended consequences. We are simply adding to it.

I want to be clear, Madam Speaker: Through this act, our government can refine and enhance existing laws to improve their effectiveness in achieving their intended objectives. This will inherently expand protections or streamline processes to better serve the people of this province. It is evident that the front line often relies on the consistency and reliability of legislation around them. Altering something without justification can undermine trust and confidence in its integrity, and we are here to have their backs.

This amendment within the proposed Enhancing Access to Justice Act epitomizes a more efficient and streamlined justice system. AMPs are more efficient and cost-effective to administer, alleviating unnecessary burdens on the courts and simplifying the process for all involved parties. Concurrently, they effectively deter violations of the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997, and its regulations, conduct that will not be tolerated in Ontario any longer.

Both the public safety and justice systems aim to prevent and deter crime and misconduct. This is why we have come together on this issue to get to the roots of the problems faced at a legislative level. Effective legislation, regulations and interventions contribute to maintaining public safety by deterring individuals from engaging in any unlawful activity. Whether civilian, fire or policing, we know justice systems uphold the rights and freedoms within communities. For this, protections in the frameworks are essential.

Ensuring justice means protecting all parties from harm, discrimination and injustice, which, in turn, promotes our goal of maintaining public safety by fostering a sense of security and trust in the legal system. This is why we are here today, because the Enhancing Access to Justice Act approaches focus on repairing harm caused by deeming behaviour and reintegrating offenders back into society in a fair way. By addressing the underlying loopholes in legislation, we are upholding the principle of accountability.

0910

More importantly, judicial decisions and legal interpretations can shape the implementation and understanding of laws. With the integration of tools and resources, we're allowing for new opportunities to minimize accusations and misinterpretation of a violation. Amendments being discussed in the House today are necessary to clarify legislative intent, reconcile conflicting interpretations and address unforeseen consequences arising from court rul-

ings. Holding individuals accountable for their actions through AMPs not only serves the interests of justice but also reinforces public trust in the legal system, which is essential for the province of Ontario and for its citizens to have faith in their fire service and the justice act.

The Enhancing Access to Justice Act is something that needs to be passed for the benefit of Ontario. This is a piece of legislation that, if passed, will ensure that the CSPA will be performed in a just way so that there's no room for mistakes. Our commitment to public safety is so deeply embedded with the public that we will pull out all the stops to ensure everyone stays safe.

With that, I will be sharing my time with the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I'm honoured to join in this debate today on Bill 157, the Enhancing Access to Justice Act.

With the Premier's leadership, our government is dedicated to creating a safer Ontario. Bill 157, if passed, furthers our commitment to law enforcement initiatives aimed at deterring criminal behaviour; probing accusations; capturing perpetrators; and bringing justice to Ontarians that are affected by broken laws.

Our signature framework, the Community Safety and Policing Act, 2019, also known as the CSPA, will have its gaps closed. If passed, this bill will be implemented April 1, 2024. As we prepare for this date, it is important we address crucial topics within this legislation to ensure it serves its purpose to the strongest capacity.

As we debate the third reading of the Enhancing Access to Justice Act in the House today, I would like to take the opportunity to highlight some of the amendments that the Solicitor General's office is responsible for crafting. One of the most important parts of this legislation is how terms are defined. We want to make sure the language for this bill is crystal clear, because misinterpretations, both in courts and out on the streets, are not acceptable.

Our justice system needs the confidence required from well-crafted legislation to adequately perform duties by judges all the way to the front-line officers working in our community. The laws, regulations and directives need to be clear in both official languages, and that is what this legislation does. This standard of accurate bilingual legislation is something we hold dearly in the government, under the leadership of Premier Doug Ford. Critically accurate translation is essential in preserving the original meaning and intention behind a word. This attention to detail is crucial for front-line workers and courts as it maintains the authenticity and style of the CSPA.

Each situation is unique and no two public safety confrontations are alike. Variables such as environment, involved parties and response can be influenced by the precise definition of terms both in the courtroom and on the street. These contextual factors shape the dynamics of a situation and affect its outcome. This is why we are not only ensuring consistency in this regulation but also providing clear definitions for terms.

Let's begin with the term "special constables" and translation. Special constables play a critical role in ensuring the safety of Ontario's communities and public areas. Premier Ford, the Solicitor General and all my caucus colleagues have the utmost respect and support for our front-line officers.

Interjections.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Yes, absolutely. Shout-out to 22 Division—thank you for your work.

Currently, the French translation of the Ontario statute states "special constables" as "agent spécial." This term, "agent spécial," is also displayed on special constable uniforms, crests and badges. Not only does this differ from the French translation of "special constable" used in Quebec and New Brunswick, but it can also create confusion in public spaces. The term "special agent" will be eliminated entirely, and "special constable" will be defined in French as "constable spécial" with the help of this act.

This is especially important because "agent spécial" is utilized in addition to the CSPA, which underscores the need for action to address this inconsistency. If passed, the amendment will change the term in all Ontario statutes within the Community Safety and Policing Act, 2019, coming into force on April 1 of this year. There is no room for confusion when it comes to law. That is why we're eliminating the inconsistencies in the French terminology.

Next, I want to discuss the coroner's amendments. I'd also like to thank our chief coroner, Dr. Huyer, who attended all the committee hearings just to hear what people had to say. I thank him for his work.

Madam Speaker, the terminology is a big part of the Enhancing Access to Justice Act and so is the groundwork. The Enhancing Access to Justice Act is updating legislation that will, if passed, allow the Office of the Chief Coroner to run more efficiently. The chief coroner oversees the provincial death investigation system, ensuring that deaths occurring in Ontario are appropriately investigated to determine cause and manner. We are extending tools through death investigations that help to identify public health and safety risks, trends and patterns related to causes of death. This information can inform public health policies, interventions and initiatives aimed at preventing future deaths.

Our government's amendments to the Coroners Act will specifically improve the timeliness of construction-related death investigations. This will help save lives because as these investigations become more efficient, more data can be used to help inform public safety precautions and possibly prevent these accidents from happening in the future.

Speaker, I think we can all agree with the Solicitor General when he says that everyone deserves to go to work and come home safely. We can all agree with that sentence.

Without construction workers, we are not able to build infrastructure in Ontario. We had a lot of deputants from the construction industry who were very supportive of this amendment in the bill.

In a time when Ontario needs a government to step up and get it done, we cannot afford to lose workers on the job or have future potential workers leave because of unsafe workplaces. Nobody here wants that. Our government has a strategic plan to build more homes in Ontario, which we cannot do without these strong men and women out on the job. The harsh reality is that working in construction has a great amount of risk, and workers are faced with dangerous situations every single day.

In my own riding on Etobicoke–Lakeshore, we have development projects worked on by hundreds of construction workers every day—we just need to drive down the Queensway—everything from condos being worked on by electricians to houses being framed. We need them more than ever to continue their work. And they deserve to feel safe.

During a public health crisis, natural disasters or other emergencies, the chief coroner's role becomes indispensable. They are the ones who take charge of coordinating and supervising the response of the death investigation system. Because of this, the responsibility of deploying resources, coordinating efforts with other agencies and ensuring the timeliness and appropriate handling of deceased individuals falls upon their shoulders.

As of now, the Office of the Chief Coroner investigates every single death related to construction incidents. However, this process is often time-consuming, leading to delays in providing answers to grieving families. Currently, it takes approximately three years for an inquest to be scheduled, which may be perceived as inactivity, especially by a loved one awaiting closure. This delay can cause frustration, particularly in cases where there are no imminent deadlines due to an investigation of natural—sorry, I can't read this. The delay can be frustrating, particularly in cases where there is no imminent deadline due to the investigative nature of the incident. Additionally, this process can only commence once all regulatory investigations and prosecutions under the Occupational Health and Safety Act have concluded.

Through the Enhancing Access to Justice Act, we aim to isolate construction fatalities to potentially identify root causes that could prevent further deaths. This was also brought to our attention during the committee meetings.

0920

The proposed Enhancing Access to Justice Act includes an amendment to the Coroners Act that, if approved, would mandate coroner-led annual reviews for accidental construction-related deaths. This amendment alters the current practice of conducting single mandatory inquests for incidents resulting in one or multiple deaths. The review process will involve industry representatives and experts, with a coroner's inquest remaining an option where and when appropriate.

We are also introducing the concept of having families becoming a significant role in the mandatory review process. We want to allow the families, if they wish, to request an inquest if they require additional review. Actively involving family members in these situations will help build stronger bonds and deepen relationships within

the community. Spending time together, engaging in meaningful conversations about incidents will foster trust between family members and the coroner's office. This is crucial in a province like this, because our government is stepping up to the plate to ensure that Ontarians get closure and partake in understanding a situation that is life-changing.

While our goal is to prevent all construction-related deaths, the proposed amendment would lead to a comprehensive examination of safety issues within specific construction sites and the industry as a whole.

These recommendations, if passed, will make a difference to families who need closure. These will help expedite processes when necessary and help bring people home when it's necessary. At the end of the day, all we want is people to come home safe from their job. That's all we can ask. The government of Ontario wants a safe Ontario where accountability is key.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to questions.

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore. Just this week, we learned that the Metrolinx project at the Mimico station has been cancelled, which means local residents have been waiting 10 years now for the GO station to be upgraded and for over 2,000 homes to be built in the area. Now what they're looking at is a hole in the ground.

To the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore: What is your plan to ensure that your residents get a station upgrade?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Well, it has nothing to do with this bill, but I'm happy to respond about the Mimico GO Station because it's very important to my community. It's a 10-minute walk from my house, and I take it all the time.

The Mimico GO Station—we are working with the Ministry of Transportation. What I'd like to see is—the company is no longer utilizing the location. So we need to find somebody else to build that GO station. There is a GO station; you can use it. What I'd like to see is us opening up some of the parking so more people can have some parking at this moment. But right now, what we do need is someone to take over the property. Metrolinx is dealing with it. I'm on top of it. My team is on top of it.

I appreciate the question, because I'm able to get that out to the constituents in my area, because it is extremely important that we're able to take transit when we can and where we need it. But my goal is to get some more parking over there. So thank you for the question.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank both the speakers for their speeches today. My question revolves around construction workers. I know there are some impacts in this bill that may be of use to them. Unfortunately, in my career, I've witnessed two construction deaths on projects that I have been involved with.

Our construction workers are building roads, highways, schools, hospitals and homes and, really, I know that our government wants to support the safety and well-being of construction workers across the province. So one aspect

that has received attention in this bill, especially by the industry and many of my constituents, involves the recommendations for construction-related death investigations. Madam Speaker, may the members please explain what those changes could look like?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the member for that question. Having worked in the construction sector for a number of years before I came to this place, I certainly understand the importance to the families, to the companies and, of course, to society as a whole.

One of the goals in the upgrade is that we want to know that workers are able to come back home safely at the end of every day, as my colleague from Etobicoke–Lakeshore said. This review would identify issues, trends and ensure recommendations that come from an inquest are provided on a timely basis, not four years, not 10 years after the incident. It currently takes approximately three years, as the member said, from the time of a death to complete an inquest. That's way too long. Sometimes there are delays for a legitimate reason because of ongoing investigations. This will encapsulate all that—and hopefully, no more than 18 months from the time of an occurrence for a report.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Jeff Burch: A question for the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore: Recently, the Premier made some disturbing statements about his desire to increase political influence over judicial candidates. His comments have caused alarm in the legal community and lowered the public's trust in Ontario's justice system. During committee, this government could have taken a step to reverse this damage by voting for an NDP amendment that would improve the independence of the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee.

Does this member agree that this government should be doing everything it can to improve public trust after the Premier's disturbing comments?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I think our Attorney General and our Premier have both been very clear on this. We do have an independent system. It is a board that is chosen. It's not chosen all by the government; it is chosen—there are people there. What was brought forward in committee hearings is—actually, we were insulted by some of these comments. There is a non-partisan board that chooses judges. You cannot say that our judicial system is partisan or non-partisan. Once you're a judge, you are a judge, and you will make that determination of a court case when you are there.

Once again, you have to look at the judicial system as it is. They are impartial. Every judge is impartial. That's why they take their job.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Will Bouma: I love it, folks, when the NDP—they can't say anything bad about a piece of legislation, so when we're debating that piece of legislation they talk about anything else other than the piece of legislation. I'm looking forward to their full support on this bill that we're discussing today.

What I wanted to ask the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore about, because I know what a fierce advocate she is for victims and access to justice: I was wondering, getting back to the bill that we're actually talking about—they could just not stand up and ask questions at all if they don't want to talk about this—what it means to her and what it will mean for victims of crime, some of the changes that we're making in this piece of legislation.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you to the member. I don't mind talking about Mimico or my riding, because I love to talk about my riding and the great work that we do there building schools, building hospitals, so that's okay.

This bill is actually extremely important because we have seen more trends of hate-related crimes, human trafficking and car theft. Car theft is rampant. Most recently, police services, including the Toronto Police Service, have reported an increase in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, hate crimes driven by, obviously, the conflict in Israel and Hamas—against Israel and Hamas.

We're proposing changes to the Victims' Bill of Rights that has made changes in regulation to allow more victims to sue convicted offenders for emotional distress and related bodily harm for more crimes, including terrorism, motor vehicle theft, hate crimes, religious officials who have been targeted or people who are disrupting religious worship, as well as far more sexual offences and human trafficking than in the past—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you.

Next question?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the members for their debate this morning.

We definitely have seen a court system in crisis. We've seen many cases being thrown out due to the lack of staffing in the courthouses, and we know that this is due to—

Ms. Donna Skelly: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Excuse me—

Miss Monique Taylor: You can't do a point of order in the middle of a question.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Madam Speaker, this is the third time that the opposition has risen to deal with something that has nothing to do with this bill.

0930

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I will allow the member to finish her question, which needs to be about the bill.

Miss Monique Taylor: The bill is definitely about access to justice. Access to justice means being able to get into court in a timely fashion. When we're talking about women with intimate partner violence, we know that there's underfunding in the system.

So what are they doing to ensure that there is actual true access to justice for these women who have fallen through the cracks due to a court system that is clearly not working for them?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the member for Hamilton Mountain for the question. A number of the

changes that are looked at here are going to make it easier for victims of crime, such as terrorism, vehicle theft, human trafficking and targeting of religious officials. They will also protect children and youth by banning the growth of recreational cannabis in homes that offer child care services and, even more important, limit interruptions to child protection trials that happen when a judge is appointed to another court. They will improve the safety and well-being of construction workers and also enhance access to justice for women who have been either trafficked and/or victims of intimate partner violence. These are all things that are intimated and expected to come from this bill.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We don't have time for another round of question and response. We're going to move to further debate.

Mr. Chris Glover: It's an honour to rise today to talk to Bill 157, the access to justice act. I'm going to talk about two different aspects of access to justice. Access to justice is a fundamental democratic right. It's actually enshrined in our democratic Charter of Rights and Freedoms. There are a number of legal rights. Number 11 is actually about access to justice, so I'm going to talk about that. I am the critic for democratic reform, so I am taking this issue from the democratic rights perspective.

There have been by this government a number of attacks on our democratic rights in this province. Because of those attacks—including the changing of the rules of Toronto's municipal election; they changed the rules midway through the campaign—when that came back from the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court ruled in a 5-4 decision that Canadians do not have the right to democratic municipal elections. Most people don't know that. That's why I keep repeating it in this Legislature, because people need to be aware that we do not have the right to democratic municipal elections.

This is something that we need to get restored, because I think for the last 160 years that we've been a country, when people go to the polls in a municipal election, they're assuming that the X that they mark on the ballot is the highest law in the land and that it cannot be overruled, but that's not the case in Canada. That's not the case in Ontario. That's something that we need to restore.

The other action from this government is that once they got that—that was in 2021 that the Supreme Court decision came back—once they got that decision, they passed what were called strong-mayor bills. And those strong-mayor bills stripped the majority of municipalities of the right to majority vote democracy. So in the majority of municipalities, the majority of Ontarians do not have the right to majority vote democracy any more.

The other thing that this government has done that's an attack on our democratic rights is that they have introduced three bills in this Legislature that utilized the “notwithstanding” clause. It's a bit of a euphemism, the “notwithstanding” clause. The “notwithstanding” clause is from section 33 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I was talking to my colleague from Humber River–Black Creek and he said that when I speak, I often sound like a

friendly professor. That's the attitude that I'm trying to have today, the friendly professor, because I really want people—
Interjection.

Mr. Chris Glover: The member for Niagara Falls says that I actually look like a friendly professor, and I was a friendly professor before I got here. I was teaching at York University.

I just want people to be aware of how important our democratic rights are and how they're being attacked and being taken away under this government, including our right to access to justice.

Section 33, the “notwithstanding” clause, actually reads that a provincial Legislature or the federal government can pass a piece of that “shall operate notwithstanding a provision included in section 2 or sections 7 to 15 of this charter.”

Section 2 of the Charter of Rights: What they're doing is they're saying a provincial Legislature can pass a piece of legislation that overrides section 2, which is our fundamental freedoms: our freedom of speech, our freedom of religion, our freedom of conscience, our freedom of association. All those fundamental freedoms have been overridden by this government three times, with three separate pieces of legislation.

Sections 7 through 15 of the charter include our equality rights. Section 11 is our rights in legal proceedings. Specifically, in section 11 it says the right to an independent and impartial judge. We have a charter right to an independent and impartial judge if we have to go before a court. This government has passed three pieces of legislation that strip Ontarians of that right.

Now, what's most concerning: Over the last couple of years, the Conservative Attorney General and the Conservative Premier have taken steps to strip us of that right to an impartial and independent judge. It started in 2019 when the Attorney General said that he wanted to appoint like-minded judges. He wanted to have judges who had similar values to his own.

Then, in 2020, we found out through the media that the Attorney General was actually interviewing Chief Justice candidates. These people were applying to be the Chief Justice of the Ontario Court of Justice, and the Attorney General was personally interviewing them.

Then, in 2021, the government passed Bill 245, which stripped the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee of their power. This Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee are the ones who make recommendations. They're the ones who are supposed to interview judicial candidates. They're supposed to make recommendations to the Attorney General, and the Attorney General is supposed to choose one or however many they need from that list. But instead, the government passed a piece of legislation that stripped that independent committee of most of their powers. So this government is now appointing the judges directly—

Ms. Donna Skelly: Madam Speaker, a point of order?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We have a point of order.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Madam Speaker, again, this has nothing to do with the bill in front of us.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I have to say, since the beginning, I asked for a copy of the bill because I was trying to find what you were talking about in relation with the bill. I will just warn you to focus your comments regarding the bill.

Mr. Chris Glover: That's fine. The bill is called the Enhancing Access to Justice Act. One of the amendments that the NDP presented in committee was to restore the powers of the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee, and the Conservative government voted that down. Some of the arguments that I'm making are that that amendment should be part of this legislation, that they should restore the impartiality and the powers of the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee so that we have independent and impartial judges in this province. That's an important principle of access to justice. It's not just an important principle; it's actually enshrined in section 11 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

This part about this principle of having impartial and independent judges—I asked the Attorney General in question period a few days ago. I said, “When you were interviewing candidates for the Chief Justice position, what questions did you ask?” I was thinking about this because, last week, the Premier said that he did not want to appoint NDP or Liberal judges; obviously, he wants to appoint Conservative judges. The Attorney General reports to the Premier, so what questions is the Attorney General asking these judicial candidates in this interview process?

I asked him that. I said, “Do you ask the judicial appointments, ‘Which party do you vote for?’ Do you ask, ‘What donations have you made?’”

Ms. Donna Skelly: Again, a point of order on the content of the debate: Again, it has nothing to do with the bill that we're debating this morning.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I will allow the member to continue, as the bill refers to judicial appointments.

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Mr. Chris Glover: Yes, it's back to that amendment to restore the powers of the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee. That's what I'm considering about.

I also asked the Attorney General: Did he think that it was appropriate for a government that's under criminal investigation to be appointing judges? And I will read his response. He said, “There were four candidates who applied to become the Chief Justice, and as I'm charged with making that decision—the establishment thought that maybe they should make the decision for me and give me a recommendation.” Well, that's not what the establishment thought; that's the role of the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee that the NDP is fighting to have restored through this legislation.

The Attorney General said, “I thought that wasn't really the appropriate way to go forward. I sat down with each candidate for an hour. Politics never came up. It's not appropriate. The opposition may not understand. Judges

don't take direction and it would be foolish to try. It would be crossing a line."

So I just want to harp on this for a second. The Attorney General, who was interviewing candidates because he wanted candidates, in his own words, with similar values and views to his own, and who is reporting to a Premier who wants Conservative and not NDP or Liberal judges appointed, said in these interviews, "Politics never came up. It's not appropriate." So there's a contradiction. There's a hypocrisy here, in that if we are to have access to independent and impartial judges, then he should not be interviewing them. He should not be asking them questions. In his own words, "It's not appropriate." His actions and the words of the Premier are not appropriate. So he should be saying to the Premier, "The actions, the words that you said were not appropriate."

Interjection.

Mr. Chris Glover: Exactly.

The other response that the Attorney General made to a question about these judicial appointments and the powers of the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee was that he said that the Liberals appointed Liberal judges.

I used to be a high school teacher, and often kids do things that they're not supposed to do. It's part of being a teenager. And then when you call them in, they sit before you and you say, "Look, you did this thing. You weren't supposed to do it. You broke the rules," they'll often say—their first response is often, "Well, Jimmy did it first." Okay.

I've got to say, the Attorney General's response that, "Yes, we're trying to appoint Conservative judges, but the Liberals did it first," it's sort of like Jimmy's response. The response that every teacher gives is, "If Jimmy jumped off a cliff, would you jump off a cliff?" If the Liberals appointed partisan judges, should you appoint partisan judges? No. In the words of the Attorney General, "It's not appropriate." It's not appropriate to be appointing partisan judges. It's not appropriate for the Attorney General to be interviewing, having private interviews with candidates for the Chief Justice position.

And the most recent twist on this, on how we are going to get independent and impartial judges, is that yesterday the Attorney General said in the media that the judges become independent after they are appointed. So they go through a process where the Attorney General interviews them. He determines whether they have appropriate Conservative credentials. He determines whether they have values that align with his own. Then, after they've been appointed, they become independent. But what he's missing there is that, in section 11 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, it doesn't just say that the judge has to be independent. And I don't know that you become independent after you've been vetted, chosen and hired by somebody who's asking you about your values and trying to align them with their own—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Order.

Mr. Chris Glover: The Charter of Rights and Freedoms also says that they have to be impartial.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Can you stop the clock, please? Can I ask the members to refrain from speaking across the aisle in a loud way, because I have a hard time hearing the member who's speaking? Thank you.

Start the clock. The member for Spadina–Fort York can continue.

Mr. Chris Glover: The reason that it is so important that we have an independent and impartial judiciary is because we need to be able to rely on it. We need to know what questions and what values the Attorney General was asking those judicial appointments about, those potential judges about. Was he asking about abortion rights? This is something that has come up in the United States. *Roe v. Wade* was just overturned down there.

The reason that I bring it up here is that we've already seen bias, or evidence that seems to point to bias, in some of the tribunals and the tribunal appointments by this government.

There's the Ontario Land Tribunal. The Ontario Land Tribunal is where community members or municipalities who think that a developer—or when a developer tries to build something that's beyond what's allowed within the official plan of a community, they can go to the Ontario Land Tribunal. The community members and the municipality can take them there. This government has appointed a bunch of those overseeing the tribunal, and the Hamilton Spectator said that 97% of the decisions are now in favour of developers. This is the kind of bias.

How independent are those tribunal appointees after they've been appointed if 97% of the time they're actually favouring developers? It's scary. It's scary because it shows the kind of bias that can creep into a system if the government is making partisan appointments. We do not want to see that happen in our courts.

The other thing that this government has done, when we're talking about access to justice: They cut our legal aid. When they got into power in 2018, one of the first things they did was they cut legal aid by 30%, or \$133 million, per year. The shame of this is that it means that low-income people do not have access to a lawyer. Even the cut-off for legal aid is \$17,000 per year. If your annual income is beyond \$17,000 per year, you can't even access legal aid.

When you think about all the challenges—whatever issue that people have to go to courts about, if they're being renovicted or demovicted or illegally evicted and they need to go before a tribunal, they're not able to access legal aid if they make more than \$17,000. Well, if you're able to survive in this province on \$17,000 per year, then you're doing something incredible. You sure as heck do not have another \$10,000 or \$20,000 to hire a lawyer if you're being illegally evicted from your place.

The government is talking about efficiency in this bill. The Enhancing Access to Justice Act is supposed to improve the efficiency of our court system. But the Chief Justice of Ontario George Strathy—this is from a newspaper article—said, "What we judges can say is that reducing legal representation for the most vulnerable members of

society does not save money. It increases trial times, places greater demands on public services, and ultimately delays and increases the cost of legal proceedings for everyone.”

If the government wants to increase access to justice, the first thing that should be in this bill is not just a restoration of that 33% of legal aid funding that they cut but, actually, an increase in legal aid funding, so that people who need a lawyer can access a lawyer, so that they're not going into courts without the proper documents, without proper representation, and they're not clogging up our courts as the judge tries to navigate through somebody who is not prepared.

The other thing that the government needs to do in order to increase access to justice is to end the chaos that's happening in our courts. I'll give the case of Emily. This was in the media a little while ago. She was raped in her home. She took the rapist to court. She went to the hospital. She went to trial. She actually testified in the trial. You've got to think about the courage that it takes to go through all of those steps in order to have your day in court and in order to see justice.

What happened was, after she had already testified, the delays in the court case—and these were caused by staffing shortages in court and by the chaos created by this government in our court system—went beyond 18 months.

People have a charter right. The person charged has a charter right to have a trial within an allotted time, and that allotted time is usually 18 months. So when it hit 18 months, the judge threw out the case.

So this woman had gone through all of the trauma of having to relive that experience, of having to go to the police and go to the hospital and go to court and actually testify with the person that she's complaining about in the courts, and then to have the trial thrown out on a technicality, on the fact that this government has not provided enough funding for our courts.

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And one of the judges, Judge Jones, in this decision about this case said, “This case should serve as a chilling reminder that this inexcusable state of affairs must never be allowed to happen again.” He attributed it to the inappropriate funding for the courts, that there isn't enough funding. And this government has actually just cut the base funding—in their fall economic statement, they just cut the base funding for our courts.

So when this government is talking about access to justice, they need to increase the base funding in our courts so that we have the staff in our courts so that trials can be heard on time, so that trials and cases like this are not thrown out.

They need to restore the funding for our legal aid services so that everybody who needs access to legal aid will have access to legal aid.

Most important of all, they need to restore the impartial and independent process for appointing judges. We cannot have partisan judges appointed in this province. It's a violation of the rights of all of us under the charter to an independent and impartial judiciary.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to questions.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: It was certainly an interesting perspective of something; it wasn't really about the bill. So I want to continue on the questioning of transit. I know the member opposite lives in Spadina–Fort York. I know that area extremely well as I used to live in his riding.

It has the GO trains. We have Exhibition Station. We're going to grow that. We have the 509 streetcar. You have so many streetcars. Everybody takes transit in that community because you don't want to have a car in downtown Toronto. It's almost impossible to have a car. There's nowhere to park.

I'm wondering the NDP and the member opposite voted against historic investments into our transit system.

Mr. Chris Glover: I believe the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore is talking about the budget bill. And the budget bill—the way that this House works and the game that's played is that they always say, “Oh, you voted against this. You voted against this.” Well, in a budget bill, there are all kinds of things.

There's a gross underfunding of our public health care and our public education system. Under this government, there's been an inflationary cut of \$1,200 per student in our schools. That's what's in the budget. And there may be some good things—some funding for transit and things—in that budget as well, but we don't get to pick and choose.

And so we voted against the budget because we believe in public education and public health care. This government was underfunding them in order to create a crisis, in order to privatize those systems.

So no, we're not going to vote for the privatization of those services. We will hear this again and again. The government will always say, “Oh, you voted against this,” and they will cherry-pick something—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you.

We're going to move to the next question.

Mr. Joel Harden: Entertaining discussion, as always, this morning. I was intrigued, my friend from Spadina–Fort York, how often you're interrupted because I'm starting to realize that the government really doesn't like criticism. Really—they don't like it internally. We've have had five people other there jump ship. There's probably going to be more. We have a Premier under criminal investigation by the RCMP, and you keep getting interrupted.

My question is this, my friend from Spadina–Fort York: Why does this government have such a hard time hearing criticism? Do you think that might be why they want to hand-pick judges, they want to hand-pick people that mirror their values?

And on transit, I have to just say for the record, the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore, right now, her crowning achievement is a hole in the ground at Mimico station. It's not much to brag about.

Mr. Chris Glover: I think it's frightening that the government is afraid of criticism. This is a democracy, and

this is a Parliament. And Parliament means that you're supposed to listen and talk. I will say that this government does not listen.

I've sat on committees for the last five years. Many times, we've brought in friendly amendments to pieces of legislation. There was a piece of legislation about expanding broadband to rural communities, and it was supposed to be—in their speeches, they all talked about rural, remote and Indigenous communities, but it was nowhere in the bill. We brought in amendments just to insert those words, and the government voted them down.

They do not understand that the role of the Parliament and the role of democracy is to listen to the other side and to take that into account so that you can improve the legislation so that you're not making so many mistakes and that you're not having to reverse every other bill that this government passes—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you.

Next question?

Mr. Will Bouma: I listened with interest to the member from Spadina–Fort York's speech. I noted with interest that while he had some suggestions on things that could have been put into the bill, he actually had no criticism of the bill. So my question is, will the member from Spadina–Fort York and his caucus be voting in favour of this bill when debate is finished?

Mr. Chris Glover: I'm going to leave you guessing on that one. But I will say, if you had made the amendments to restore the powers of the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee, if you had restored the power to have an impartial and independent process for appointing judges in this province, then we probably would be supporting this bill because that is a vital part of our democratic rights. That you've taken that away and you have an opportunity to restore it and you're not doing it is really shameful.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The next question.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Spadina–Fort York. During committee for Bill 157, government members voted down a motion to increase access to legal aid. We know that when more people have access to legal aid, they get their fair day in court. It can speed up processes because people are not representing themselves. They're not well informed, because they're not lawyers, on how the process works.

How does a lack of access to legal aid affect residents in your riding?

Mr. Chris Glover: Actually, I was talking to a court clerk. She was telling me that one of the issues when they cut the legal aid services and cut access to legal aid—people come to court and they don't have the proper documents. You've got a judge; you've got a lawyer for the one side; but this person does not have a lawyer, so they're not properly prepared. Then, the time in the court is spent trying to help this person to get the documentations, to understand what documentation they actually need in order to have their case heard. This is Family Court, so

these are often cases about divorce settlements, about payments, and it's also about child custody.

These things are urgent and need to be heard. But instead of having a lawyer so that the process can be heard and a decision made and people can move on, the court's time is being taken up—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you.

Next question?

Mr. Will Bouma: The member has explained that he's going to keep us guessing on whether he will support this piece of legislation or not. We hear all the time the opposition say that we call them out for not having voted in favour of pieces of legislation. But I've heard no criticisms of this piece of legislation other than some additions that the opposition would like put into the bill.

We're making it easier for victims of crime to sue an offender. We're protecting children and youth in this piece of legislation. We're going to limit interruptions to child protection trials. So many good things that I think we all agree on in this House are being put into this piece of legislation. I'm not going to put the member on the spot on whether he'll support this or not, but if the opposition chooses not to support this piece of legislation, what would that member say to someone in his riding who asked him about why he didn't support this legislation, seeing as the NDP has no criticism of the piece of legislation?

Mr. Chris Glover: The government is talking about this access-to-justice bill as if it's going to solve the safety crisis that we have in our communities across this province, and it's not going to do that. The reason that we have a safety crisis in our province is because we have such high levels of poverty. We've got so many people—if you look at jurisdictions where there's a great gap between rich and poor, they consistently have higher rates of violent crime. When you look at the TTC, when you've got people using transit as a shelter, when that's their home, then you're going to have issues. When you don't have mental health supports for people in mental health crises and there's no place for them to go, then you're going to have problems. So if the government wanted to make our communities safer, in this bill, they would—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you.

Next question?

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Mr. Joel Harden: I'm just wondering, in the time we have left, member for Spadina–Fort York, if you couldn't impress upon this government that in fact you brought a very important message today, that if they want to actually preserve access to justice, you have to fund the court systems that we have, and in particular, as you mentioned, the victim support groups that can be there for families in their time of need.

Mr. Chris Glover: Absolutely. I've done a lot of work with victims of gun violence. One of the things that this government did is that they took out—for victims of violence, there was up to a \$25,000 allotment that was

given to them. This government took that away. And the disruption in somebody's life, in a family's life when somebody has become a victim of gun violence, whether they've been able to survive or not, is incredible. A lot of these people are in low-income families. They do not have the financial resources to actually weather that crisis. So one of the things that the government should do is restore the victim allotment so victims of violent crime can get some funding to help them get through that period and that trauma.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): That's time. We're going to move to further debate.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise to speak to third reading of Bill 157, a bill with 19 schedules. There are some good schedules, like schedule 18, that enhances victims' rights. But I have an obligation to express some serious concerns with this bill, starting with schedule 1, which changes the regulatory framework for architectural technologists. Since 1969, the AATO has been the statutory regulator for architectural technologists in Ontario. This was reaffirmed by the courts in 2022. Yet the government has made a change to this regulatory framework without any consultation with architectural technologists, who have raised serious concerns around this particular change.

Secondly, I want to raise concerns about schedule 4 and, in particular, concerns raised by the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario about the provisions in schedule 4 that weaken the transparency and accountability of the public consultation process for making changes to critical regulations governing the Community Safety and Policing Act.

I think it's important to put into the record a quote from the privacy commissioner:

"Transparency around the regulation-making process under CSPA is even more compelling given:

"—the increasing adoption and deployment of emerging information technologies in policing (such as artificial intelligence and facial recognition) that put Ontarians' access and privacy risk at heightened risk, and

"—the heightened public interest in enhanced transparency and accountability when it comes to both the governance of police powers and the mitigation of systemic discrimination associated with policing."

Nothing that was changed in this bill at committee addresses these serious concerns by the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and it would be nice to know from government why they haven't addressed these concerns.

Speaker, I want to close by saying that if the government was serious about enhancing access to justice, they would start by repealing Bill 245, which politicized the political process for choosing judges, especially through the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee changes, which the Premier has now quadrupled down on, saying he wants to appoint like-minded judges. The politicization and the Americanization of our judicial system is dangerous, it's wrong, and the government needs to backtrack on these changes now.

We have heard over and over from legal experts saying that the process that was used to appoint justices was

working fine until the Premier came along and brought in American-style politicalization to that process, which I believe is dangerous for people's access to justice in this province.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to questions for the member for Guelph.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I listened with interest to the brief remarks from the member for Guelph. He didn't have much time.

Certainly we hear from constituents and Ontarians across this province that there are huge concerns about what the Premier is saying about the politicization of the judicial process. I wondered if the member would like to take a little bit more time to elaborate on why this is so dangerous to democracy and why the Premier should reverse his decision to appoint those partisan members to the judicial committee.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member from London's question. I say we just have to look south of the border to see why this is so dangerous. We have a long tradition in Canada—unlike the US, where you have Republican and Democratic judges—of just having judges that apply the law—not what the Premier wants, but the law—so it is incredibly dangerous when a politician of any political stripe gets up and says, "We're not going to appoint judges with this political affiliation or that political affiliation. We're going to appoint like-minded judges." Well, the bottom line is, access to justice should be fair and equitable, and it should be based on applying the law, not what the Premier tells a judge to do.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I've noticed this government cuts first, instead of "measure twice and cut once." Here, we're seeing a layer of transparency in terms of changes in policing that affect already marginalized and racialized communities. Can you guess at how this might impact marginalized communities when we see proposed changes that aren't made public and there is no stakeholder and community feedback?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member from Kitchener's question. I'm deeply concerned about schedule 4, which the Information and Privacy Commissioner brought forward. When significant changes to police regulations are proposed—under the current act, they would be made publicly available for a comment period and the public could be engaged in commenting on these regulatory changes. But given the provisions in schedule 4 of this bill, that's no longer necessary, so the government is saying the public won't have the opportunity to comment on these changes.

Rightfully so, the Information and Privacy Commissioner has raised serious concerns around this, especially as it relates to marginalized communities across the province.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: We talk about faith-based hate crimes, and they are on the rise. We hear about that

everyday on the news. I was actually knocking on doors on Friday in my riding and was disappointed to hear somebody who said some things I thought were awfully cruel—not about me, but about others who I care about.

The Victims' Bill of Rights already allows victims of hate-based crimes to seek civil damages for emotional distress and related bodily harm. One thing in this bill is changes to the regulations. They've added terrorism offences, which are often hate-motivated; hate crimes which are targeting clergy; and disruption of worship. As we hear about that more and more, I believe those changes are important, and now these victims can charge or sue for emotional distress.

Does the member support that, which is in this bill, and will you be supporting this bill—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you.

The member for Guelph for a quick response.

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Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the question from the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore. If the member will recall my debate remarks, I opened by saying that some schedules in this bill, particularly schedule 18, which is what this question refers to, are good parts of this bill. Absolutely, we should make it easier for victims of crime to sue an offender for emotional distress.

I also think we should make it easier for the public to comment on changes to police regulations, which is why I'm raising concerns in schedule 4 of this bill along with the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: It looks like I have about five minutes to be able to start debate on Bill 157, Enhancing Access to Justice Act. It is a lengthy bill, with many provisions affecting many parts of our court system: our Law Society Act, our Coroners Act, our Architects Act. It's a hefty bill. But New Democrats have definitely taken the time and the position to focus on true access to justice and what that means to us, what it means to people of Ontario, and the things that we had hoped that we would have seen in a bill titled "access to justice."

Speaker, you've been here for quite a few years also. We have definitely seen many bills put in front of this Legislature that have really great titles that intrigue the public into thinking that there could actually be something good in that bill for them. And then we see that it typically does quite the opposite and leaves the people of Ontario out. That is what we see time and time again with this government. It's unfortunate. But so it is, the Enhancing Access to Justice Act.

I want to take the opportunity to talk about intimate partner violence in the province of Ontario and how people across this province are calling for funding, they're calling for the word "femicide" to be used, to actually state that it's an epidemic, and this government is refusing to do that. I know that New Democrats, during the committee portion, had put amendments on the table that the government voted against. They voted against ensuring that—

what was it? Government committee members voted against an NDP amendment that would have required the Attorney General to make a plan to increase the amount of funding to Ontario's rape crisis centres, sexual assault support centres and domestic violence support centres.

The Ford government stopped renewing a \$1-million funding boost to rape crisis centres in 2020. And they have been ringing the bells, saying they need support. They are not able to keep up with the growing amount of women who need access to supports, to safety. When we have a Premier who gets on his feet and continuously talks about the crime rates that happen in the communities and yet fails to support the women who need access to a safe place to get away from those perpetrators, it's really, really, really unfortunate. And it's clear. The underfunding, the lack of supports that these centres have seen for years have women in danger on a regular basis.

This letter is an open letter calling for a provincial declaration of intimate partner violence as an epidemic. This was on December 6—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I apologize to the member. I know you were expecting it, but I need to interrupt as it's 10:15 and we need to move to members' statements.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

LAMBTON COLLEGE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL TEAM

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's my privilege to rise today and inform the House that this past Sunday, in front of a capacity crowd of thousands of raucous fans in Sarnia, the Lambton College women's basketball program won their first-ever Ontario Colleges Athletic Association championship with a convincing 78-56 win over the previously undefeated and number-two-ranked team in Canada, the Algonquin College Wolves.

With the historic victory in the provincial championship game, the mighty Lambton Lions secured the school's first-ever invitation to the Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association championship tournament, being held next week at Lakeland College in Lloydminster, Alberta.

Led by coaching prodigy Janine Day, and conference player of the year and first team All-Canadian Breanna Pretty, the 2023-24 Lambton Lions utilized a smothering full-court defence and relentless, fast-paced offence to dominate on the hardwood this season, compiling a 19-2 record so far. The average margin of victory for the Lions this season is nearly 29 points per game.

As the Lambton Lions prepare to make the trip west to the national championship tournament, I want to say to all the coaches and the players at Lambton College, on behalf of the Ontario government and all the members of the Legislature, congratulations, and good luck. We will be cheering for you. Go, Lions!

CRAIG CONNELL

1020

Mr. John Vanthof: On Sunday, I attended a celebration of life for Mr. Craig Connell. Craig made an incredible difference in my life and, judging by how full that room was, on many others.

I first met Craig as a fellow board member on the board of Dairy Farmers of Ontario. I can honestly say I have never disagreed with anyone as often and as vehemently as Craig Connell, and I have never enjoyed someone's company so much.

Craig was the first person I told that I was going to run for MPP. We were standing at a bar at an event. He asked me if I was going to run for the board; I said, "No, I'm going to run for MPP." He said, "Oh, you'd be great," and as I was walking away, I heard him mumble, "My God, he might run for the NDP." He came over to my table, and he stopped and he said, "I have an announcement to make." He put his hand on my shoulder and he said, "John here is going to run for MPP, and if he was in my riding, I'd even vote for him, even if he's running for the Communists."

He leaves behind Moira; his daughter, Alison, and his son, Lloyd, and their families; and an incredible business legacy with Wicketthorn Farms. And he leaves behind an incredible legacy to all of us for all the things that he fought for. He emigrated from Scotland and brought his skills to this country, and made all our lives better, whether we know it or not. On all our behalf, thank you very much.

GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS

Mr. Will Bouma: Last week, I was pleased to welcome the Associate Minister of Housing to the city of Brantford to announce a \$3-million housing investment from our government as part of the Building Faster Fund.

This funding was awarded to Brantford because they were able to exceed their housing target by 8% last year. Brantford broke ground on a total of 788 new housing units, unlocking an additional \$400,000. Brantford should be proud of the work that they have done to get shovels in the ground faster. I am honoured to represent a city that is dedicated to ensuring that residents have a place to call home, and I am appreciative that our government provides the necessary tools to help the city of Brantford to achieve their goals.

Brantford continues to grow at an unprecedented rate, and I am grateful to all those in the Brantford–Brant community, including Mayor Kevin Davis, for working with our government to meet the development and investment needs of our community. I am thankful every single day for the incredible working relationship that I have with the city of Brantford. With the support of these provincial funds, our community will sustain its expansion, while creating new job opportunities and business growth. Brantford will continue to be the best place to live, work, play and raise a family in Ontario.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Jessica Bell: It was beautiful weather yesterday—for May, not March. Toronto's winter was the warmest on record. It is an extreme weather event, just like the Texas Smokehouse Creek fires, just like the fires across Canada that darkened our eastern seaboard for weeks last year, just like the warmest ocean temperatures that have ever been recorded that were recorded this January. These are terrifying signs about the health of our planet.

The Conservatives have set a completely irresponsible target of reducing emissions by 30% by 2030. This government is ideologically opposed to wind and solar and energy efficiency. They're spending billions of dollars on a highway that we don't need, and they're doubling down on paving over farmland to build homes that people simply cannot afford. This is not the kind of leadership that an advanced industrial state like Ontario should be demonstrating; it is an example of failure.

Ontario needs to reduce its emissions by 50% by 2030. It needs to put in place the investments, policies and programs to deliver on that call, from retrofitting homes and buildings to investing in energy efficiency and to investing in public transit. We have the know-how, the technology and the workforce to act on climate. What we need from this government is the political will. To ready us for the future, it is time to rise to the challenge and act in a manner that meets the crisis we face.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: February 22 was Heart Valve Disease Awareness Day, and at Turtle Creek Manor in Mississauga–Lakeshore I hosted a free stethoscope check event for local seniors with Ellen Ross and her team from Heart Valve Voice Canada. I want to thank cardiologist Dr. Gurpreet Parmar and nurse practitioner Cheryl Low from the heart team at Trillium Health Partners for all their help with this event and for everything they do to care for patients living with heart valve disease.

Again, I want to thank all members for supporting my private member's bill, Bill 66, the Heart Valve Disease Awareness Act, which is now at the committee on social policy.

In 2021, I was proud to co-sponsor another bill to raise awareness for sickle cell disease with the Minister of the Environment. Lanre and the Sickle Cell Awareness Group of Ontario were the driving force behind Bill 255, and they're back at Queen's Park today. I'm proud to sponsor their reception and invite all members to join us tonight at 5 p.m. in rooms 228 and 230 to learn more about sickle cell disease.

Lastly, Speaker, Kidney Patient and Donor Alliance Canada will be here tomorrow, and I'm proud to sponsor their reception as well. I invite all members to join us for lunch tomorrow in room 228 after question period to learn

more about kidney care from patients and donors from across the province of Ontario.

ASSOCIATION DES ÉTUDIANTES ET ÉTUDIANTS FRANCOPHONES

MPP Jamie West: À Sudbury, on a plusieurs organisations en français. Cette fin de semaine passée, j'ai eu le plaisir de rejoindre un group formidable pour fêter la 50^e année de l'Association des étudiantes et étudiants francophones, l'AEF.

L'AEF est une organisation située dans l'Université Laurentienne qui offre plusieurs services et un soutien incroyable à la communauté d'étudiants.

Cette occasion était très spéciale parce que l'AEF est l'une des premières associations étudiantes franco-ontariennes à rejoindre 50 ans d'existence. Pendant la fête, j'ai présenté à l'AEF un certificat de reconnaissance pour leur 50^e anniversaire.

Depuis ces débuts, l'Association des étudiantes et étudiants francophones a joué un rôle important à l'Université Laurentienne. Pour 50 ans, ils offrent de nombreux services pour aider à soutenir la communauté étudiante et promouvoir la langue française. Ils et elles devraient être fiers de leurs réalisations passées et présentes.

J'aimerais souhaiter le meilleur pour les années à venir à Nawfal Sbaa, le président, à tous les membres du conseil, et à tous les étudiants et étudiantes qui sont impliqués avec l'AEF. Félicitations à l'AEF pour cette étape impressionnante.

BISHOP GARFIELD RACICOT

Mr. Kevin Holland: I rise today to recognize a good friend and colleague, O'Connor township councillor Bishop Garfield Racicot, who sadly passed away on December 30.

Bishop's journey began in Sudbury, but through the twists and turns of life, he made his home in the township of O'Connor in 1993. Shortly after moving to O'Connor, Bishop embarked on a new chapter in his life, dedicating himself to the betterment of his community by running as councillor, a role he fulfilled with unwavering commitment and integrity for the next 24 years.

Bishop's passion for the township of O'Connor was evident in everything he did. He worked tirelessly to advocate for the welfare and prosperity of its residents, fuelled by a deep-seated belief in the potential of his community. Bishop was a friend to many, a beacon of kindness, compassion and generosity. His love of people drove him to open his food vending operation where he served up his own brand of hometown advice and conversations, along with hamburgers, hotdogs and poutine.

His warm smile and genuine concern for others endeared him to all who had the privilege of knowing him. Whether offering a helping hand or a listening ear, Bishop was always there, ready to uplift and support those in need, even during very difficult times in his own life.

I extend deepest sympathy to Bishop's wife, Linda; son, Mitchell; grandson, Bishop; and the rest of the family.

Bishop's legacy of service and compassion will endure for generations to come, and we shall honour his memory by continuing the work he began.

Rest well, my friend.

COLDEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I want to thank the 600 Guelphites who walked in the Coldest Night of the Year on February 24, to raise funds for Hope House. Together we raised \$193,592.

I was proud to walk on Team Orpha, led by Orpha Thrasher, who is 102 years young. Orpha is the mom of my constituency staff member, Shelley, and wife of the late Ivan Thrasher, MPP for Windsor-Sandwich from 1964 to 1967.

Hope House alleviates poverty by building community. Hope House feeds 2,400 people, supplies fully-stocked backpacks to 2,300 school children and provides services to meet the basic needs of over 1,500 people. Organizations like Hope House are trying to help people find a safe, affordable place to live.

I'm proud to say that my community in Guelph has mobilized to build a 32-unit permanent supportive housing project. I want to thank the government for contributing \$3 million in capital funding for the project. Now, I urge the government to fund the health care supports needed to open up the permanent supportive housing project so we can ensure that we can move people from the streets and tents into a home.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I rise today to commemorate International Women's Day. This year's theme is "Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress."

There are many women here who have done that, and I wanted to acknowledge a few in my life who have been able to do that, like Louise Mercier, who has been a leader with the Navy League of Canada, who works with the Conference of Defence Associations Institute and has been on the executive of the foundation of the Rideau Perley long-term care facility; or Barbara Farber, who is a leader in our Jewish community, is involved in commercial real estate and is not only a philanthropist but an honorary lieutenant colonel of the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa;

Sonya Shorey, as members in Ottawa would all know, has been leading Invest Ottawa, as the interim CEO, and just like any strong woman, she can hustle better in high heels and stilettos than any man ever could.

I'd like to congratulate Lynne Hamilton for her work at Equal Voice in prompting the voices of women—and of course, my own mother and my late aunt Ena, who despite the fact that it was my father who was elected six times, it was my mother leading my Aunt Ena's campaign for election to school board that really got me involved in politics.

Of course, Speaker, I'd like to say thank you to all women in this chamber for showing their strength of leadership

and character, as well as the women who support us, both inside this chamber and out, as staff of either yours or ours.

1030

Finally, I would just like to wish one of our colleagues in particular well this International Women's Day: Caroline Mulroney, our President of the Treasury Board. She was a former seatmate of mine, a friend and a valued colleague. I know this week has been very difficult for her with the passing of her father, the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney. But before he was the Prime Minister of Canada, he was Caroline Mulroney's father. He dedicated his life to his family, her and her three brothers, and I know her grace, her kindness, her intelligence are all characteristics and traits that he passed on to her—as well as her mother, Mila Mulroney.

I want to say on this International Women's Day that we will continue to invest in women across the province, and we will continue to accelerate their progress. To all women in this chamber, Happy International Women's Day.

GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS

Mr. Graham McGregor: Yesterday was a wonderful, wonderful day in Brampton North. I spent the afternoon down at Loafer's Lake. If you haven't had a chance to walk around Loafer's Lake on a sunny day, Mr. Speaker, you really ought to try it.

Yesterday I had the pleasure of showing off Loafer's Lake to Ontario's terrific Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. We were joined by Brampton's mayor and city council, as well as a ton of local community groups, namely the People Against Littering, the Brampton Environmental Alliance, Heart Lake Happenings, the Guru Nanak Mission Centre and, of course, the legendary Heart Lake Turtle Troopers.

We were happy to see the minister and even happier when she brought a big cheque with her. I'm pleased to report to the House that the Ontario government is investing in Loafer's Lake and the surrounding wetlands through a wetland preservation grant to a total of \$2.5 million. This money will be used for a few purposes: restoring the Loafer's Lake shoreline, combatting invasive species, enhancing the natural flood mitigation around Etobicoke Creek, planting 6,500 trees up near Conservation Drive and more. All of this work will happen by the end of 2024.

Speaker, restoring the Loafer's Lake shoreline is a task I've been seized with for literally a year and a half. I'm thrilled we're getting it done this early in my term. Yesterday was a wonderful, wonderful day.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our member statements for this morning.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'd like to introduce two constituents: Tracy MacDonald—she is the CEO of Trillium

Mutual—and Julie Garner; she is the board chair with Trillium Mutual Insurance. Welcome to Queen's Park.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I'd like to welcome, from my constituency of Newmarket, Kara and Max Bilo, who is also a friend of Skye Baker, a page from Newmarket.

I'd also like to give a warm welcome to Derek Rowland, who is from my hospital, Southlake Regional Health Centre. Welcome to your House.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I had the pleasure this morning of meeting with representatives from the Sickle Cell Awareness Group of Ontario: Delaney Hines, Dr. Jacob Pendergrast, Fitz-Ann Howell and Simone Griffith, a fantastic representative from Hamilton. Thank you so much for educating me. I also want to thank MPP Cuzzetto for his support of that group. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: I would like to welcome the parents of our page captain, Paras Sodhi: his dad, Sandeep Sodhi; mother, Rajni Sodhi; and sisters, Akriti Sodhi and Kriti Sodhi. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: For International Women's Day, I want to recognize and welcome some incredible women from Parkdale–High Park who are in the galleries today as my guests. We have Karen Allmen, co-founder and coordinator at the Bloor West Food Bank; Maggie Galloway, who joined the Bloor West Food Bank as a volunteer and now has moved into her current role as coordinator; and also Mary Anne Waterhouse, co-founder of Bloor West Food Bank, although she cannot be here today. Speaker, these women are devoted to bringing community together to tackle food insecurity and foster sustainable practices.

They have with them their guests: Maureen Sirois, Karen's sister; Arthur Galloway, Maggie's husband; as well as Angela Gei, Wendy Lyon and Carolyn Anne, volunteers at the Bloor West Food Bank.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature the parents of page Anushga Trivedi from my riding: her dad, Biren, and her mom, Truph.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to welcome members of the Sickle Cell Awareness Group that are here with us today: Lanre Tunji-Ajayi, who is the president; Corey Fletcher, a physician in training; and Lisa Tinker. Thank you for being here today, and hopefully everybody joins the reception this afternoon.

Hon. Stan Cho: I had lunch yesterday with today's page caption, Niklas. He's got to be the healthiest 14-year-old I have ever seen in my life. I want to welcome his parents, Teresa and Chad Low, to the Legislature today.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker.

Remarks in Anishiniimowin.

I'd like to introduce the intern that we have from OLIP. Her name is Bridget Carter-Whitney, who will be working with us this spring. And also some guests from the riding of Kiiwetinoong from Cat Lake First Nation: Rachel Wesley and also Gordina Oombash. Meegwetch for coming.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure today to introduce Derek Rowland to the assembly. Derek, of course, was my issues manager, he was my deputy chief of staff

and director of communications while I was Minister of Community and Social Services, with responsibilities for women's issues and immigration as well as heritage, sport, tourism and culture. Of course, because he was issues manager and I am me, we all should be thankful for him for the great work that he did 365, seven days a week, 24/7, during his time in government.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I would like to welcome guests from Terrace Bay. They've come a long way to be here: the president of United Steelworkers Local 665, Stephen Downey; executive members Warren Sutherland, Michelle Richardson and David Mayry; and USW staff representative Cody Alexander.

Thank you so much for coming. Welcome to your House.

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: It's my pleasure to welcome great friends from the Sickie Cell Awareness Group of Ontario: Lanre Tungi-Ajayi, Timothy Tunji-Ajayi, Doreen Alexander, Delaney Hines, Dr. Robert Klaassen and Dr. Jacob Pendergrast. Welcome to your House.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): If there are no objections, I'd like to continue with the introduction of visitors.

The member for Scarborough Centre.

Mr. David Smith: I rise today to wish my daughter, who's turning 6 today—

Interjections.

Mr. David Smith: Thank you. I know there are going to be a lot of heads looking around. Some of us start early and some of us start late.

She's going to be 6 years old today, yes. Star Smith said that she'd like to be here with Daddy, so somewhere along the line, I'm going to have to train her to become a member of this House.

QUESTION PERIOD

HIGHWAY TOLLS

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier. Our plan to remove tolls on trucks on Highway 407 would save people money and time. It would help ease traffic for everybody. Across the province, people clearly support this common-sense solution. Why is this government willing to sit back and let a private company continue to profit off Ontario drivers instead of doing something to make life easier for them?

1040

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

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Look, this isn't about truckers. This isn't about the 407. This is the NDP's continued opposition to Highway 413. They continue to listen to the protest groups. The people of this province sent a very loud and clear message to that member and the previous Liberal leader and the current Liberal leader, who has actually continued on this campaign to cancel the 413.

Come to Brampton, come to Mississauga and listen to the challenges people are facing on the streets every single day and the gridlock that they are facing. Our government is committed to building \$30 billion worth of infrastructure—roads, highways—all across this province and that is exactly what we will do. We'll continue on our path forward to build Highway 413.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: No, Minister, this is about getting some relief for people today, not 10 years from now.

I'm going to bring my question back to the Premier. This is about political will. The Minister of Transportation said yesterday that it would be just too difficult to scrap tolls on Highway 407 because it's owned by a private entity. He even admitted to journalists that it is within the government's power to renegotiate the 407 contract, but they're not willing to do it.

So my question back to the Premier is, why is this Premier so afraid of taking on the 407 operator?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: You want to talk about actions we can do today? That member knows that on April 1, the carbon tax is about to go up 23%. Let's talk about the challenges that long-haul truck drivers face with the carbon tax today: \$15,000 to \$20,000 per truck driver on long-haul truckers that they face with the carbon tax. That's \$15,000 to \$20,000 that they could be putting back to their families.

Let's talk about the changes that we've made, whether it was getting rid of the val tags, \$125 per car or truck, or the reduction of the gas tax by close to 10 cents a litre. That member has never once supported any of those measures that we have put forward for drivers across this province. Will that member stand up and call her federal counterpart and the Prime Minister and say a 23% increase in the carbon tax is unacceptable and they will not stand for it, and stand with truckers as we oppose that increase in the carbon tax?

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: The 407: the mistake that this government—this party—made and that the people of Ontario keep paying for. Ontarians see through this. They see through this. Just last month, this government made a big show about legislation to ban tolls on major highways, but they exempted the only provincial highway that actually charges tolls.

Yesterday we gave them a chance to reverse their soft-on-tolls policies and actually do something, but they refused. Back to the Premier: When are you going to start prioritizing the interests of Ontarians instead of big corporations?

Interjections.

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

The Premier.

Hon. Doug Ford: Let me get this right: You're against the 412 and 418. You voted against getting rid of the tolls. You voted against the 413. You voted against the Bradford Bypass. You voted against the largest transit expansion in North America. Which way are you going today? Are you going one way, are you going the other way?

At the end of the day, we've done more for the taxpayers of Ontario than any government in the history of this province, reducing the cost and burden of being taxed to death. You're for taxes; we're against taxes.

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

FOREST INDUSTRY

Ms. Marit Stiles: I think the people of Ontario are wondering why this Premier is so afraid of the 407 operator.

My next question is back to the Premier. In January, it was announced that the AV Terrace Bay pulp mill would close indefinitely, throwing 400 workers out of work. Workers from the mill, members of USW Local 665, are here today. I welcome them. They're watching us now and they're looking for answers from this government.

This is a viable mill in a competitive industry. If this mill is allowed to shut down, somebody else is going to open a mill outside of Ontario to do the same work.

Can the Premier tell these workers and the people of Terrace Bay what they are doing to save these jobs and get this mill back up and running?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. Graydon Smith: Thank you for the question. We have—and I've told this House many times—been working since the second that mill idled to get it open again, and my greatest respect to the steelworkers that are here today that have joined us that are concerned about their jobs. We are equally concerned about their jobs and the best thing that can happen is that mill reopens. We will be remorseless in our—sorry, in our—blah, blah, blah. Some days you've got it and some days you don't. But we will not stop in our efforts to get this mill open.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I heard their media studio piece this morning, and they talked about all the things that we're actually already doing, including making investments in the forestry industry to make sure that there's a forestry industry in the future we can all count on. And the NDP and the Liberals had 15 years to do that. They did not do it. We're doing it every day. We're supporting that sector every day.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Back to the Premier: There are a lot of heads shaking in Terrace Bay and Schreiber and across northern Ontario right now. People in northern Ontario and Terrace Bay are saying, "What about us? What about us?" This morning, one of the workers said, "All we need is some hope." When you grow up in a single-industry

town and the mill closes or the plant closes, that's it. There's no hope. So they're asking this government to fight for them—to stand up and fight for them.

And what is this government doing? They are saying the same things they always say; they're making these empty promises. Those workers came a long way today to hear this government say, "We are going to fight for you and we are going to fight for northern Ontario."

When will this Premier fight for the people of Terrace Bay?

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Order. Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. Graydon Smith: Mr. Speaker, we have been fighting for them every single day, and the opposition knows that. They are taking advantage of a situation to play political theatre and political games once again today.

Meanwhile, we're working the phones. We're looking for the opportunities. We're looking for the operators. We're the ones making the investments in the forestry sector to make sure that Terrace Bay and Schreiber and every community in the north can benefit from a strong forestry sector: \$60 million announced last week invested in biomass and the forestry sector, the same product that gets used in those mills, because we're looking towards not only today, but to the future.

So to the opposition: Stand up and join us. You know we're doing the right things. Stop playing games and let's get this done. Let's get it done for everybody.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The House will come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Okay, I'm going to start calling out members by name to come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Start the clock.

The supplementary question: the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you. And I'd like to say, the biomass projects have nothing to do with helping the workers in Terrace Bay. There has been no communication with the workers in Terrace Bay whatsoever.

The owners of the mill, the Aditya Birla Group, received nearly \$130 million from the province with an expectation that, when they purchased the mill, they were in for the long haul and the community could depend on the jobs. The town, the workers there and all the surrounding communities don't have two years to wait until maybe another

multinational thinks they can get a good deal on a mill that actually produces some of the best pulp in the world.

1050

There has been no communication with the workers and almost no communication with the town leadership, so everybody is waiting to hear something.

So I want to know now, today, with workers who have travelled all the way here from Terrace Bay, what is the government doing, specifically, to bring back jobs for the workers at Terrace Bay, to bring that mill back to life?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. Graydon Smith: To say that biomass has nothing to do with what we're talking about in Terrace Bay is to fundamentally misunderstand how the forest industry works. But be that as it may, I'm not surprised. I'm not surprised.

Listen, we've gone over this again. The moment this mill shut down, we were in contact with the mayor. We were in contact with multiple mayors. We held regional meetings. That member was at the meetings. That member knows exactly what we've been doing. The Leader of the Opposition had a phone call with her. She knows exactly what we've been doing. So for them to play this pantomime that they don't know what's going on—we've been fully transparent about the efforts we've been taking on behalf of those fine workers who have joined us today, on behalf of a community. We want to see this mill going again.

It's a private sector company that signed a horrible deal with the previous government—big shocker there. But we want to get this mill going again, and we're going to continue to work for the people in Terrace Bay every single day.

INDIGENOUS CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: *Remarks in Anishiniimowin.* Good morning. A Global News investigation revealed how youth from northern First Nations are being targeted by for-profit group home companies. These companies do this because their owners can charge First Nations more for the care of our children. These companies see our children and youth as a steady source of revenue, as cash cows, as one operator said. Our children and youth are not dollar signs.

To the Premier: Do you condone this abuse?

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

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank my honourable colleague for the question. Let me make it very clear: Our government will do whatever it takes to protect every single child and youth in our province. There is no room in our system for providers who refuse to provide high-quality care, full stop.

Our government didn't need another report to tell us. We took action. We created 20 new inspector positions across the province. We increased the number of inspections across homes. We increased the number of unannounced inspec-

tions that were being done. We improved the quality of the child welfare data to establish a common standard for every children's aid society across the province.

These actions have demonstrated that, once again, we will do whatever it takes to protect every child and youth in our province. It's the moral and legal obligation of every provider to make sure they protect children and youth. We will hold them to account every single time.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Words are good, but we need action. We cannot continue to sit on our hands. We need to do something right. Our children must be treated as human beings when they are in care. It is very clear that this government has failed them. Group homes cannot continue to break child welfare laws without any consequences.

To the Premier: Again I ask, what action will your government take today?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Through the Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy, we are increasing access to community-based prevention and early intervention supports, ones that are culturally appropriate and reflect Indigenous customs, heritage and tradition.

On action, as I mentioned earlier, it was our government that said actions were not taken. Enough was not done to support the children and youth, which is why we had the consultations with Indigenous leadership. The Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy is co-developed by the Indigenous communities with the Indigenous leadership.

And we took action. As I mentioned to you, Mr. Speaker, we increased the number of inspectors across the province. We increased the number of unannounced inspections. We posted just this past summer that we are looking at increasing fines, all to make sure that those providers that are looking after our children and youth in this province know that they have a moral and legal obligation to look after them. We will hold them to account.

EDUCATION

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is for the Minister of Education. Our government agrees with parents in Ontario: Students need to be in class getting back-to-basics education. Last week, we heard the minister tell this House that Ontario is second in the nation in reading, writing and math, top 10 in science and top 15 in math internationally. We need to keep this momentum going. We must work to keep children learning and provide them with the stability they deserve so they can continue to succeed in school.

Can the minister please explain what's being done to support students in Ontario and ensure they stay in class without interruptions from threats of union strikes?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member from Newmarket–Aurora for this question. I'm proud to report to this House that our government has concluded teacher negotiations with the Catholic teachers, meaning all children—two million kids—are in class where they belong. This is very good news for Ontario families, because these kids deserve routine in their lives. It has been almost a generation since the last time a government has delivered deals without any strike or any withdrawal of service at the local or provincial level. It is good news, and we should celebrate progress, stability for children and common sense back in our school system.

We are committed to ensuring our kids get back on track. It's why routine is foundational as we go back to basics. I am grateful to Ontario educators, to the families and students, to the members of this government caucus who stood up for kids for the right to learn, to stay in school, with peace and stability for the next three years. That is the legacy we deserve for Ontario kids.

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the minister for his response. It is great to see our government reach a historic agreement to keep Ontario students in class. This is an agreement that parents want and students deserve.

Speaker, our next generation have big, bold dreams for their futures. It is of critical importance that they have our support to develop the skills, understanding and self-efficacy they need to grow and thrive. Our government must continue to put education first, deliver stability and invest in students' potential.

Can the minister please tell the House how our government is preparing Ontario students for future success?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Our government is reaching higher and demanding better when it comes to ensuring our kids have the skills and competencies necessary to succeed in our country. It's why we have introduced legislation and passed it—the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act—designed to refocus our school system and our school boards on academic achievement to boost reading, writing and math and extend discipline to the classroom.

We are imposing accountability and transparency on school boards to ensure that the new kindergarten curriculum introduced this year will actually provide daily instruction on literacy and math. We are ensuring that kids get the skills they need—the life skills, the job skills necessary to compete, get good jobs and graduate with confidence.

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Mr. Speaker, that's why we are proud to have delivered on our promise to the parents of this province—stability, common sense and hope for the kids of Ontario.

HIGHWAY TOLLS

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Minister of Transportation.

Anyone stuck in 401 traffic knows how busy the 401 is—and it turns out, they've studied it. It really is the busiest highway on the continent. While commuters spend hours in bumper-to-bumper 401 traffic, the 407 sits half empty.

The NDP's solution to divert commercial trucks from the 401 traffic jam to the 407 was, unbelievably, voted against by this Minister of Transportation.

So my question to the minister is, why is he turning his back on a good idea when it means commuters will sit and wait?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Mr. Speaker, once again, this is just another opportunity for the NDP to try to oppose Highway 413.

Every step of the way, this government has put forward measures, especially in that member's riding, as well, removing tolls on the 412 and 418.

What did that member do when they had the opportunity to vote in support of removing tolls on the 412 and 418? She voted against that measure.

Everything this government has done has been focused around putting more money back into the pockets of drivers, whether that's reducing the fuel tax by 10 cents; removing tolls on the 412 and 418; fighting the carbon tax, which is about to go up 23%—that will not only impact truckers; it's going to impact every single family in this province.

That is why, under the leadership of Premier Ford, we will continue to make historic investments in infrastructure, build Highway 413, and put more money in your pockets.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I was very proud to table the private member's bill to remove the tolls from the 412 and 418, and I was really pleased the government made it a priority four years later.

Speaker, people have places to go. People want to get home. They want to get to school. They want to get to work.

This government's pet project, as we've heard, Highway 413, is at best 10 years away, and it may or may not make a 30-second difference in the lives of commuters.

In the meantime, removing truck tolls is a creative solution to better utilize a highway we already have, and this government won't even talk about it.

Now that the Minister of Transportation has had a moment to think about it, would he like to correct his record and vote for a good idea?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: There it is, Mr. Speaker. That member just said exactly what that motion was all about. It was about cancelling Highway 413.

And absolutely not—we are going to get shovels in the ground. We're seeing historic population growth in this province, especially in areas like Peel, especially in areas like Halton and York. We received one of the largest mandates, under this Premier, to build Highway 413, and that is exactly what we will do.

We're not going to listen to the federal environment minister, who says he's not going to invest or build any more roads or highways or bridges in this country.

Get out of the Queen's Park bubble. Hit the roads of Mississauga, Brampton, Vaughan and see for yourself the gridlock people—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Waterloo, come to order. The member for Ottawa South, come to order. The Minister of Health, come to order as well.

Start the clock.

The next question.

TAXATION

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is for the Minister of Energy.

People in my riding tell me daily that they want to be treated equally and fairly when it comes to the carbon tax.

With the carbon tax rate set to increase next month, Ontarians can expect to see a hike at the gas pumps, from 14.3 cents per litre to 17.6 cents per litre. This is absolutely unacceptable. People are already struggling with inflation. It's unfair that they're being forced to pay more for gas.

It's obvious that the independent Liberals and opposition NDP don't care that this unnecessary tax is making life more unaffordable for their constituents. That's why our government will continue to support Ontarians and call for an end to the carbon tax.

Speaker, can the minister please tell the House how the federal carbon tax is hurting the hard-working individuals and families in this great province?

Hon. Todd Smith: The member from Whitby is absolutely right once again. The federal carbon tax accomplishes nothing that it intended to do and it's only hurting Ontario families, Mr. Speaker.

When the federal government introduced the carbon tax, they told us a couple of things: They said applying the additional tax to fuels would help reduce emissions, and they also told us that we would get back more than we paid through the carbon tax rebate. Well, we know that that's not the truth, Mr. Speaker. We know both of these things have been proven to be untrue. The Bank of Canada says that interest rates have been affected because of the carbon tax. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has said we're not getting back more than they said we would, and still, members of the Liberal caucus are saying that this the case. The Commissioner of the Environment—a federal agency, Mr. Speaker—has even put out a report saying the federal government will miss their own emission targets. The carbon tax is 0 for 2, Mr. Speaker. The jig is up. It's time to scrap this harmful tax.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: The minister is right; this carbon tax isn't working for the people. Instead, it's making life more expensive.

Speaker, under the previous Liberal government, people in my riding saw their electricity prices skyrocket because the Liberals insisted on signing energy contracts for power we didn't need. Since we were elected in 2018, our government has taken a different approach: We've worked to make energy more affordable so that hard-working Ontario families don't have to choose between paying their electricity bills or putting food on the table. Unlike the opposition NDP and the independent Liberals, we will always put Ontarians first.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how our government is delivering the support Ontarians need as they experience more financial hardship due to the carbon tax?

Hon. Todd Smith: Through our Powering Ontario's Growth plan, we're putting all kinds of new generation in place, expanding our nuclear facilities, which are creating an environment for new investment in our province. But at the same time, we have fought the carbon tax since the very beginning, Mr. Speaker. The carbon tax is driving up the cost of everything, and that's been proven out by the experts that I cited earlier. But families at home know. The folks from Terrace Bay who drove all the way here know exactly what it means when they go to fill up their pickup trucks in northern Ontario, Mr. Speaker.

We're in the midst of an affordability crisis, not just in Ontario but across this country. So, if you were in charge of the federal government in an affordability crisis, would you pause the carbon tax? Would you potentially rewind the carbon tax, or would you do what Jagmeet and Justin are doing, full steam ahead on the carbon tax, in three weeks' time raising it by another 23%. It's irresponsible, and it's—

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

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Premier.

Metrolinx has just cancelled its plan to build nearly 3,000 homes and upgrade the Mimico GO station after Vandyk Properties went bankrupt. So, what that means is that local residents have been waiting 10 years for a GO station upgrade and all they've got is a hole in the ground.

So, my question is to the Premier: How many times does Metrolinx have to fail to deliver on a project before this government holds that transit agency to account?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Infrastructure.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much to the member for the question. I think it's really important that we understand the circumstances that we are in. Mr. Speaker, we are having economic challenges. Those challenges are not immune to the province of Ontario. The process is before the courts, and the new landowner will be selected, but Metrolinx acted really quickly and brought itself out of the deal in order to protect the infrastructure and protect the transit-oriented community at Mimico station.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to work with the city of Toronto, and we will continue to work with the new land-

owner to make sure that we build housing, affordable housing, public realm space and, of course, a GO station that the people in Etobicoke rely on.

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The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And the supplementary question? The member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Joel Harden: Back to the minister: For folks watching at home, there's a reason why you didn't get an answer to that question today. The sad thing is, public transit construction in Ontario has been hijacked by a self-serving, overpaid bureaucracy led by a million-dollar man, Phil Verster, that this Premier and that minister will not hold to account.

Are we going to hear another speech, after my supplementary question, about wonderful transit projects to come in 10 years, or is this government finally going to hold a corrupt bureaucracy to account and fire Phil Verster?

Hon. Kinga Surma: I'm actually really pleased to have this opportunity to talk about the transit work that is happening, particularly in the GTA, under Phil Verster's leadership, under Premier Ford's leadership and under Minister Sarkaria's leadership. Eglinton Crosstown West is being tunnelled and approaching Royal York station. The Scarborough subway is being tunnelled and the Ontario Line construction has started, as has construction at Exhibition station. Now, of course, we're focusing our energies on Yonge North.

This was a subway transit plan that they said would never be done. Work is under way, and we will continue to build stations and public transit in the province of Ontario.

MUNICIPAL PLANNING

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good morning, everyone. My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. I'm sure the minister fondly remembers last year at committee when I asked him about the major transit station area approvals. It has now been 111 days since the minister told me that sign-off would be soon and that "soon" meant "very soon."

Well, in those 111 days, not only have the Ontario Liberals released a comprehensive housing plan, including a strong focus on quickly approving and upzoning MTSAs, but also, I have had the time to order a Webster's dictionary for the minister and I've highlighted the definition of "soon." I'm happy to educate the minister on his vocabulary. "Soon" means "without undue time lapse," "before long," "in a prompt manner," "straightaway," "shortly"—some time in the 21st century.

Enough of the vague promises and false hopes. We need a specific date and time for municipalities to get shovels in the ground. Speaker, my question to the minister is, when will you approve the MTSAs for Toronto and Ontario?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the opportunity. Of course, we are working very closely with Mayor Chow on developing approval of those official plans, but at the same time, we understand that, after 15 years of Liberal government, no homes were being built across the province of

Ontario. In fact, they took away the dream of home ownership. That is the legacy of the Liberal government when they were in power.

They introduced a housing policy the other day. The new housing critic, what did he say about his own policy in 2022? When asked about major transit station area building, he said he was going to fight against it and use whatever levers he could to stop this outrageous type of development from happening. So on the one hand, the Liberal critic says he wants more, but when he's in private with his community groups, he calls it outrageous.

Now their Liberal leader, she doubles down. She calls a 12-storey condo unit that she disapproved of and rejected "an abomination." That's the Liberal record. They say one thing, they accomplish nothing—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The supplementary question.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Tick tock, you need a clock, Minister.

If the government truly believes that they're delivering on their housing plan, let's look at their track record: Limit exclusionary zoning in municipalities through binding provincial action? Nope, hasn't been done. Allow as-of-right zoning up to unlimited height and unlimited density in the immediate proximity of individual major transit stations? Nope, hasn't been done. Allow as-of-right zoning up to six to 11 storeys with no minimum parking requirements on all streets utilized by public transit? Nope, hasn't been done.

I could go on, because they have yet to implement 52 of 55 recommendations from their own housing task force.

Speaker, the Ontario Liberals have a bold housing plan. In 2026, under Bonnie Crombie, we will fix the many, many disasters and crises this government has created—

Interjections.

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

I apologize to the member for Beaches–East York. I had to interrupt her because I could not hear her.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We're paying attention to the time. I can reassure all members that that is the case.

Please restart the clock. The member for Beaches–East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: My question for the minister is: Do you need a link to the Ontario Liberal housing plan so you can actually get shovels in the ground and address the housing crisis?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. The House will come to order.

Please start the clock. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I certainly won't need a link to anything that the Liberals have done because under the 15 years that they had the opportunity, housing starts never really increased, did they? In fact, they stayed steady. You know what happened when we got elected? They increased

year after year after year after year. You know why? Because we kept removing obstacles. The last year that the Liberal leader was in office in Mississauga, you know how many housing starts they got? Twelve. That is the record of this leader of the opposition: 12 housing starts. In fact, she increased development charges by over 27%.

You know what happens, Mr. Speaker, when you increase taxes? You make housing unaffordable. When you put in carbon taxes, you make housing unaffordable. When you increase development charges, you make housing unaffordable. You know what communities have done that? Mississauga did it. That's why the population of Mississauga decreased. Burlington is doing it, and that's why they're missing their housing targets. Where there are Conservative mayors, they reduce taxes; they remove obstacles; and they're getting the housing done. Stouffville—

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

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.
Start the clock. The member for Brantford—Brant.

TAXATION

Mr. Will Bouma: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. The new Liberal leader has been such a staunch advocate for the carbon tax. She could not be more out of touch with the everyday reality that hard-working families and businesses in this province are facing. They are dealing with higher inflation and higher interest rates. The last thing they need is governments raising costs even more on them. But unfortunately, that is exactly what the Liberals are doing with their carbon tax, which they plan on raising again on April 1.

Our government will always oppose this tax. We are committed to lowering costs for the people and businesses across the entire province. Can the minister please highlight what our government has done to lower the cost of doing business across the province of Ontario.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Our party has opposed the carbon tax right from day one. While the Liberals raise taxes, we continue to lower taxes. We reduced the cost of WSIB premiums by 50%, saving the business community \$2.5 billion each and every year. We have put a capital cost write-off in that has saved the business community \$1 billion a year. We continue to reduce the burden of red tape; 500 pieces have been reduced, saving almost \$1 billion a year.

The carbon tax penalizes business. While the Liberals raise taxes, we continue to lower tax. We ask that we scrap the tax today.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

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Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you to the minister for his response.

The Liberals, under the leadership of Bonnie Crombie, are indistinguishable from their federal cousins in Ottawa. They both don't understand the challenges everyday people

are facing, and they think now is a good time to hike taxes again. They both listen to out-of-touch activists in ivory towers who support the carbon tax, while ignoring the hard-working families in this province who despise it.

While the Liberals ignore them, our government will always listen to the hard-working people of this province. We know that by keeping costs down, we can create the conditions for new investments and more good-paying jobs.

Can the minister highlight how, by reducing costs, we've been able to secure new investments and create good-paying jobs across the entire province of Ontario?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Mr. Speaker, we have shown the Liberals the way. We've shown them what happens when you raise taxes, and we've showed them what happens when you lower taxes.

By us lowering taxes, we have seen the province create 180,000 new jobs just last year alone—700,000 jobs since we were elected, \$11 billion in new investment, all because we lowered the cost of doing business by \$8 billion annually. Last year and the year before and the year before that, \$28 billion in investment came into this province in the auto sector, because we lowered the cost of doing business; \$3 billion in life sciences came here, because we lowered taxes. Tens of billions of tech dollars flowed into Ontario because we lowered taxes. You get these results by lowering taxes.

Imagine where we would be if we didn't have a carbon tax.

REPLACEMENT WORKERS

MPP Jamie West: My question is for the Premier. It's about anti-scab.

The Premier and the Conservative government talk a good game when it comes to support for workers, but nobody is fooled. For every single one of the Working for Workers bills, New Democrats introduced anti-scab amendments. They voted them all down. Last fall, I brought forward anti-scab legislation. They voted that down.

Anti-scab legislation prevents labour disputes from dragging on. It helps prevent conflict.

My question is, will the Premier tell the millions of Ontario's workers, from skilled trades to public workers, why he supports their jobs being taken from them if they find themselves in a strike or lockout?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you for the question. Those millions of workers know that this government has got their back. Speaker, 98% of deals in 2023 were done at the bargaining table. In fact, I'd like to congratulate the Minister of Education, who continues to ensure students will remain in class, because we also land deals with public sector unions.

When it comes to these workers, they know that when given the opportunity, that party opposite vote against the 413, against the record 50 hospitals under construction, and against nuclear refurbishment. They can twist themselves into pretzels all they want, but when it comes to

workers and working in Ontario and a prosperous Ontario and the men and women who are going to get it done, it's this government making the investments to ensure that they can have a better job and a bigger paycheque.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question: the member for Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Back to the Premier: Last year, in March, my NDP colleagues and I reintroduced anti-scab labour legislation for the 16th time. The Conservatives, once again, voted against it.

Last week, Bill C-58, the federal anti-replacement worker, anti-scab labour bill passed second reading with all-party support. Even the federal Conservatives supported it. They voted in favour of it.

If we were to table anti-scab legislation in this House for the 17th time, will the Premier follow the example of his federal Conservative counterparts and support workers by voting in favour of it?

Hon. David Piccini: As I said, 98% of the deals for Ontario workers are done at the table.

The question I would ask that member opposite is, will you support your NDP colleagues across Canada and fight against the carbon tax that's killing life for workers?

Mr. Speaker, I visited that member's community, and they know she doesn't support our record investments to attract world-class auto manufacturing jobs in their community—the Gordie Howe bridge; the painters and the tapers who we need for that bridge; the hospitals, Speaker. And we just heard again in question period today they would cancel the 413.

That party is broke when it comes to ideas for workers that keep men and women in Ontario employed. Not only are we doing that, Speaker, but we've launched a record fund to help workers get better jobs, bigger paycheques. We've expanded supports for injured workers. Speaker, all they offer workers is misery because they have no plan to keep Ontario—

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

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question today is to the Minister of Health. Last month, the government caucus voted down my bill to improve the Northern Health Travel Grant. During debate, the parliamentary assistant to the minister said, "We know that patients can't afford delays or more talk or endless committees and that it's time to get it done for families in northern Ontario."

Speaker, given this statement from the parliamentary assistant, I would ask the minister the following question: How soon will the minister and her ministry get it done for northerners and raise the rates for reimbursement and improve the delivery of the Northern Health Travel Grant?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I couldn't agree more with my parliamentary assistant, doing excellent work in the ministry. The answer is, we're already doing it. We have already improved the northern Ontario health travel grant. More work needs to be done, absolutely; I agree on that point.

But while we are improving that system and program available to the people of Ontario, I want to remind the member opposite that the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, a northern Ontario school of medicine that was formed by a Conservative government, has now almost doubled the amount of positions and seats available for people training in the north. What does that do, Speaker? It means that people who train in the north tend to stay in the north and continue their service to the people of Ontario as physicians, as nurses, as lab technicians, as paramedics. We're putting the effort in to make sure that we expand not only the opportunities for people to train, live and work in the north, but of course, our primary care expansion. I would be remiss—

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again to the minister: The fact is, more and more northerners are going to start having to travel for health care as this government allows the system to crumble. Northern hospitals are at the brink of financial crisis, and already we are seeing people in the north lose access to primary care. In Sault Ste. Marie and in the Algoma area, 10,000 people are losing access to primary care through the Group Health Centre in May.

Speaker, I agree with the member from Sault Ste. Marie when he says, "I think what we need are the experts in the field to tell us what the concerns are and where the potential remedies of those concerns are."

Minister, the Northern Health Travel Grant and primary care are vital to northerners, and we should hear from them. Who's right here, Minister? The member from Sault Ste. Marie or your parliamentary assistant?

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

Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The moment that the Group Health Centre made that announcement, the member from Sault Ste. Marie was actively working with all of the participants to make sure that they could provide services and ensure that that community was served by primary care.

There were two primary care announcements made that will directly improve access to primary care in Sault Ste. Marie. But that's not all. In Manitoulin Island, Porcupine, Kapuskasing, Sudbury district, French River, Burk's Falls, Timmins, Chapleau, Wawa, Powassan and more—I could go on. The point is, we are making the investments in primary care expansion. The recruitment is happening today, and we will see those expansions make a noticeable impact for the people of northern Ontario and across Ontario who want access to a primary care physician—the first expansion of multidisciplinary teams since they were formed in our government.

TAXATION

Mr. Ross Romano: Shocker, Mr. Speaker—Sault Ste. Marie is getting all the love today. I'm loving it.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I have a very, very important question on behalf of the people of Sault Ste. Marie for our wonder-

ful Minister of Energy. Many individuals and families, particularly those in northern Ontario, rely on fuel to heat their homes. Unfortunately, residents in rural and remote parts of northern Ontario face additional barriers in heating their homes due to the lack of viable alternatives.

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Families and businesses in Sault Ste. Marie are telling me that they already feel the carbon tax's impact on their energy bills every single month, and quite frankly, this has been a pretty warm winter in Sault Ste. Marie and throughout the province. It's unfair and unjust for them to bear the burden of this regressive carbon tax, yet the Liberals and the NDP are content to see the costs related to the carbon tax raised even higher.

Minister, please let us know how our communities in the north are suffering more because of this unaffordable carbon tax.

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the member from Sault Ste. Marie for the question. He is right: Members in northern Ontario, like in Sault Ste. Marie, don't have a lot of choice when it comes to how they heat their homes. A lot of them are using home heating fuels, natural gas and propane.

April 1 is coming up fast; it's about 25 days away. April 1 is known as April Fool's Day, and this year it happens to be Easter Monday as well, but do you know what it is again in Justin Trudeau's world? It's Groundhog Day, because once again this year, they're increasing the carbon tax. This time, they're increasing the carbon tax by 23%. What does that mean for those who heat their home in Sault Ste. Marie and across Ontario? Almost \$400 a year in an increase to their home heating bill, not to mention what it means for you when you fill up at the pump and what it's going to mean in the grocery store.

Mr. Speaker, it's time to stop this charade at the federal level. Call Justin. Call Jagmeet. Put a pause on this carbon tax. We need to stop it today.

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

Mr. Ross Romano: Thank you so much to the minister for that exceptional response.

As the cost of living continues to rise, people are justifiably concerned about the carbon tax and how it's going to make everything in our life more expensive. Workers from all sectors of the economy are already feeling the hardship and challenges because of the carbon tax, and sadly, the federal government does not care. They just don't care, Mr. Speaker. They're not doing anything to change it.

Ontario's hard-working individuals, businesses and farmers deserve to be treated fairly, and they deserve to be treated with dignity. Our government must continue to stand up for the people of this province and ask Justin Trudeau and the federal government to please end the carbon tax.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how further increases of this terrible tax, the carbon tax—this awful tax—are going to hurt Ontarians?

Hon. Todd Smith: It's really simple. The Parliamentary Budget Officer in Ottawa has said it. The Bank of Canada has said it. All of those who understand how the economy works have said that this carbon tax is having an impact on the price of affordability and the price of everything that we purchase, from groceries to gas to home heating fuels.

With an increase of 23% in the carbon tax on April 1, it's going to drive up your home heating bill by another \$400 a year. There are many people across this province who simply can't handle that.

We've done everything we can possibly do in Ontario to make life more affordable. We fought the carbon tax all the way to the Supreme Court. We've lowered gasoline taxes by 10.7 cents a litre, eliminated licence plate sticker fees and eliminated tolls on our highways. We've never raised a tax. We've never raised a fee. And do you know what has happened? In spite of that federal carbon tax, that terrible tax, being in place, we're seeing record growth in our province: 700,000 more people are working today than when we took government in—

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

CHILD CARE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, to the Premier: The Jackman daycare in my riding and other child care centres are facing profound financial problems. Frozen or falling provincial funding for child care is causing centres to dip into their reserves to keep their doors open. Families cannot afford to lose child care should centres go under or be plunged into crisis. Will the Premier take steps now to address the financial crisis in child care centres?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And to reply, the Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, we have reduced fees by 50% for working families in Toronto and across Ontario. We are building 19,000 spaces in the city of Toronto; 86,000 across the province. We have increased funding for the child care sector at the provincial level, of course, supported by federal investment. Together, we've been able to support our operators—all operators, which, of course, is an ideological difference of perspective to the Liberals and New Democrats, who would have omitted the 30% of the sector who are, God forbid, for-profit small businesswomen who operate on small margins of profit. These are people who work hard in our communities; they deserve to have the full support of parliamentarians.

That's why we stood up to the federal Liberal government for a better deal, for flexibility and support for all families in Ontario, and they should expect that our government will deliver more relief, more spaces and stand up against Liberal bureaucratic delay.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Again to the Premier: We're hearing a lot of happy talk from the minister about how wonderful things are in the child care sector, but in reality, parents

are facing the loss of child care in this province, a disaster for them, for their children and for child care centres. Will the Premier replace the failed provincial funding formula with one that works for child care?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: What would have been disastrous is if we followed Liberal advice and precluded every for-profit operator in the province, denying thousands of families their right to affordable care. Mr. Speaker, contrary to the perspectives of the members opposite, we've actually created 41,000 net spaces since 2019. We are cutting fees. We are increasing affordable access to families in small towns and big cities.

But what we don't agree with, with respect to the federal Liberal government, is that they should omit for-profit families. We believe as Progressive Conservatives in respecting the choices of parents to raise their kids. We will stand up for flexibility, stand up for affordability and keep building spaces for the people of this province.

TAXATION

Mrs. Robin Martin: Good morning. My question is for the Associate Minister of Small Business. Mr. Speaker, small businesses are the backbone of Ontario's economy, employing millions of people across many sectors. Unfortunately, I've heard repeatedly from business owners in my riding that they're facing ongoing challenges from rising costs due to the federal carbon tax. They were disappointed, to say the least, in the federal government's decision to cut the carbon tax rebate for small businesses from 9% to 5%, effective this year.

Speaker, entrepreneurs need opportunity, not obstacles, to drive innovation and growth. While the Liberals and the NDP turn a blind eye to our job creators, our government is listening and looking out for them. Can the associate minister please share with this House what small businesses are telling her about the impact of the federal carbon tax?

Hon. Nina Tangri: I really do appreciate the question from the great member from Eglinton–Lawrence. Last week, I had the pleasure to talk to several chambers of commerce from across the province. However, I've heard the overwhelming frustration their members are feeling from last week's changes to the federal carbon tax rebate still owed to our small businesses.

Small businesses from all of our ridings contribute significantly to carbon tax revenues but receive very small portions of it in rebates. Cutting the amount we return to businesses, as the federal government is now doing, will make the burden worse, especially given that they're still owed billions of dollars from previous years of collections.

Speaker, whether it's a rural bakery struggling with higher natural gas bills or an urban manufacturing shop dealing with diesel price hikes, business owners all agree this tax is unfair. Businesses need affordable energy so they can focus on retaining and creating local jobs. We'll continue to stand up for the prosperity of small businesses across Ontario. It's time the opposition did the same.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the associate minister for her response. The carbon tax negatively impacts our businesses. It's a drag on our economy and it hurts Ontario workers. Business owners in my riding tell me that Liberal and NDP politicians who advocate for a carbon tax are out of touch with reality. Small businesses have contributed as much as 40% of the overall carbon tax revenues, and the sad, sad reality is that these additional expenses are ultimately passed on to every consumer.

Our government must continue to advocate for the small businesses across the province and ensure that they receive the support they need. Can the associate minister share with the House how the carbon tax is costing small businesses and consumers in Ontario?

1140

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you, Speaker, and again to the member for the question. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, if rebates were returned to all eligible incorporated Ontario businesses, each would see around \$2,637 for the past five years. When considering the hardships many small firms have endured already, every dollar returned could make a vital difference, whether to cover bills, hire staff or invest in growth.

What's worse is the provincial Liberals and NDP failed. They failed to stand up to their federal cousins as they announced they'd be slashing rebates to small businesses from 9% to 5%, which means they're only going to get less than half back.

Speaker, unlike Carbon Crombie and the Liberals and the NDP, this Premier and this government will keep fighting until Ottawa scraps the tax because small businesses can count on us to have their backs.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: My question is to the Premier. For years, the government has ignored the crisis of predatory HVAC scams which target seniors, newcomers and those living with disabilities. Scam artists trick people into signing contracts where the devices get more expensive every year, the contract lasts longer than the lifespan of the machine, and the buyout is tens of thousands of dollars when the machine itself only cost hundreds. Sounds like a scam to me, Speaker.

When will the government stop talking about a problem everyone knows about and finally act to protect seniors and others who are being scammed to this day?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: We have heard the pleas of our seniors and our vulnerable citizens on this. We have taken action through section 60 of the recently passed Consumer Protection Act. We have consulted widely across the spectrum, and we are taking action. Doing nothing is not an option. We will stand up with our seniors.

What started out as a legitimate registration for HVAC equipment has become a tool for fraudsters and organized criminal activity. We will take action, Mr. Speaker. Doing nothing is not an option. The door-to-door sale solicitation

has to stop. We are looking at everything, including an outright retroactive ban. Stay tuned.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'm really pleased to hear this government can show their support for my bill, because we're in a cost-of-living crisis and we need to make sure we're looking after these horrendous, costly and lengthy contracts.

When these scam companies register a notice of security interest, or NOSI, it becomes a lien on a homeowner's property. The scam artists target the vulnerable and give everyone else in the industry a bad name. According to the government's own numbers, 38,000 NOSIs were registered in 2022. So I look forward today, when the NDP tables its legislation to look after NOSIs going into the future and those that have been registered historically, that this government will support it.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Actually, Mr. Speaker, it was government Bill 142 that first addressed the abolition of NOSIs, and it was the parties on the opposite side that accepted my plea to support it, so we thank them for that. The legislation has passed. More to come. Stay tuned for action on eradicating NOSIs. I look forward to that.

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

RECEPTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): If I could ask for the House's attention. When you're a member of provincial Parliament, it's never too early to begin planning for your retirement. As members are aware, we have a retirement savings plan, a defined-contribution retirement savings plan, and the Speaker is, in part, responsible for administering it. So tonight, between 5 and 7, we have a members' retirement savings plan reception. We'll have representatives from Canada Life and Eckler partners there to answer any questions you might have about your retirement savings plans.

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order. The member for Ottawa–Vanier.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I do have a point of order. I probably should know this one by heart by now. But I am seeking unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 100(a)(4), five minutes be allotted to the independent members as a group to speak during private members' public business today.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa–Vanier is seeking the unanimous consent of the House that, notwithstanding standing order 100(a)(4), five minutes be allotted to the independent members as a group to speak during private members' public business today. Agreed? Agreed.

I recognize the member for Ottawa–Vanier.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Thank you. Maybe I'll continue with my luck.

I now seek unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 66(d), the time for debate on the orders for concurrence be allotted as follows: 56 minutes to each recognized party and eight minutes to the independent members as a group.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa–Vanier is seeking unanimous consent of the House that, notwithstanding standing order 66(d), the time for debate on the orders for concurrence be allotted as follows: 56 minutes to each recognized party and eight minutes to the independent members of the group. Agreed? I heard a no.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Waterloo on a point of order.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Members will know that today is the Ontario Mutual Insurance Association lobby day. I just want to introduce Julie Garner, who's the chair of Trillium Mutual Insurance, and CEO Tracy MacDonald from Waterloo. Welcome to your House.

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

The House recessed from 1146 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

REMOVING RED TAPE
FOR HOMEOWNERS (NO MORE
PUSHY, HIGH-PRESSURE HVAC
SCAMS) ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À ÉLIMINER
LES FORMALITÉS ADMINISTRATIVES
POUR LES PROPRIÉTAIRES (FIN
AUX ESCROQUERIES DE LA PART
DE VENDEURS DE SYSTÈMES
DE CVCA INSISTANTS ET ADEPTES
DE LA VENTE SOUS PRESSION)

Mr. Kernaghan moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 169, An Act to amend the Personal Property Security Act to prevent notices of security interests from being registered against homeowners where the collateral is a prescribed consumer good / Projet de loi 169, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les sûretés mobilières pour empêcher l'enregistrement d'avis de sûreté à l'égard d'un propriétaire si le bien grevé est un bien de consommation prescrit.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll invite the member for London North Centre to briefly explain his bill.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It's an honour for me to present the Removing Red Tape for Homeowners (No More Pushy, High-Pressure HVAC Scams) Act, 2024. I'd like to thank my co-sponsors, the MPP for Humber River–

Black Creek, the MPP for Waterloo and the MPP for Parkdale–High Park, as well as Linda Palmieri, Sarah Tella and Bethanie Pascutto, who presented today.

The government recently held a consultation where they learned 38,000 NOSIs had been registered in 2022 alone. My bill would stop this predatory practice in its tracks by allowing the registrar to remove a notice of security interest upon writing from a consumer, as well as stop those moving forward. It would make sure that we stop the scam economy in Ontario.

I'll just read the explanatory note: Section 54 of the Personal Property and Security Act is amended to provide that a notice of security interest where the collateral is a prescribed consumer good or an extension of any such notice shall not be registered and that any such existing registrations shall be discharged by the registrar.

I look forward to this bill passing.

PETITIONS

EMERGENCY SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Melissa Anderson from Val Therese in my riding for this petition.

“911 Everywhere in Ontario....”

“Whereas when we face an emergency we all know to dial 911...; and

“Whereas access to emergency services through 911 is not available in all regions of Ontario but most Ontarians believe that it is; and

“Whereas many Ontarians have discovered that 911 was not available while they faced an emergency; and

“Whereas all Ontarians expect and deserve access to 911 service, throughout our province;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To provide 911 emergency response everywhere in Ontario by land line or cellphone.”

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

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I want to thank the citizens of Grimsby for sending this petition to raise social assistance rates.

“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.”

Speaker, I support this petition. I will sign it and ask page Skye to bring it to the table.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I would like to thank Jamie Paton from Bowmanville for this petition.

“Extend Access to Post-Adoption Birth Information

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas current legislation does not provide access to post-adoption birth information ... to next of kin if an adult adopted person or a natural/birth parent is deceased;

“Whereas this barrier to accessing post-adoption birth information separates immediate family members and prohibits the children of deceased adopted people from gaining knowledge of their identity and possible Indigenous heritage;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to extend access to post-adoption birth information ... to next of kin, and/or extended next of kin, if an adult adopted person or a natural/birth parent is deceased.”

I fully support this petition. I will sign it and pass it to page Abigail to deliver to the table.

HEALTH CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Joanne Larocque from Val Caron in my riding for these petitions.

“Health Care: Not for Sale

“Whereas Ontarians get health care based on their need, not on their ability to pay;

“Whereas the Ford government wants to privatize our health care system;

“Whereas privatization will bleed nurses, doctors and PSWs out of our public hospitals and will download costs to patients;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To immediately stop all plans to privatize Ontario’s health care system, and fix the crisis in health care by ...

“—licensing tens of thousands of internationally educated nurses and other health care professionals already in Ontario;

“—incentivizing health care professionals to choose to live and work in northern Ontario.”

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

TUITION

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a petition here sent by the Canadian Federation of Students—Ontario—thousands

of students. In this case, I have folks from Trent University who have said:

“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

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“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.”

Of course, I will affix my signature to this and will send it to the table with Mesapé.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like Jeannie Salvalaggio from Skead in my riding for these petitions.

It reads as follows:

“Let’s Fix the Northern Health Travel Grant...”

“Whereas people in the north are not getting the same access to health care because of the high cost of travel and accommodations;

“Whereas by refusing to raise the Northern Health Travel Grant (NHTG) rates, the Ford government is putting a massive burden on northern Ontarians who are sick;

“Whereas gas prices cost more in northern Ontario;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To establish a committee with a mandate to fix and improve the NHTG;

“This NHTG advisory committee would bring together health care providers in” northern Ontario, “as well as recipients of the NHTG to make recommendations to the Minister of Health that would improve access to health care in northern Ontario through adequate reimbursement of travel costs.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my name to it and ask my good page Sarah to bring it to the Clerk.

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: J’aimerais remercier Christine Séguin d’Azilda dans mon comté pour ces pétitions.

« Soutenez le système d’éducation francophone en Ontario... »

« Attendu que les enfants francophones ont un droit constitutionnel à une éducation de haute qualité, financée par les fonds publics, dans leur propre langue;

« Attendu que l’augmentation des inscriptions dans le système d’éducation en langue française signifie que plus de 1 000 nouveaux enseignants et enseignantes de langue française sont nécessaires chaque année pour les cinq prochaines années;

« Attendu que les changements apportés au modèle de financement du gouvernement provincial pour la formation des enseignantes et des enseignants de langue française signifient que l’Ontario n’en forme que 500 par an;

« Attendu que le nombre de personnes qui enseignent sans certification complète dans le système d’éducation en langue française a augmenté de plus de 450 % au cours de la dernière décennie; »

Ils et elles demandent à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario « de fournir immédiatement le financement demandé par le rapport du groupe de travail sur la pénurie des enseignantes et des enseignants dans le système d’éducation en langue française de l’Ontario et de travailler avec des partenaires pour mettre pleinement en oeuvre les recommandations. »

J’appuie cette pétition, monsieur le Président. Je vais la signer et je demande à Skye de l’amener à la table des greffiers.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a petition entitled “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 share the concern of all my constituents who have signed their name to this. I will add my name, and I will give it to Abigail to take to the table.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I’m going to remind the members that when we refer to each other in the Legislature, we refer to each other not by our given names or our surnames but our riding names or ministerial responsibility, as applicable. Even when we’re presenting petitions, that would be the best policy to pursue.

PRESCRIPTION CONTRACEPTIVES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank D. Chenal from Hanmer in my riding for this petition on universal access to contraception:

“Whereas Ontario residents should have the ability to make their own choices about their health and family planning;

“Whereas cost is the greatest barrier to access to contraceptives in Ontario;

“Whereas free prescription birth control is only available to Ontario residents under the age of 25 and without insurance coverage;

“Whereas the provinces of British Columbia and Manitoba already provide free prescription contraceptives to everyone under their health care plan; this helps thousands of people” gain “access to prescription birth control without spending” money;

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

“To immediately cover universal access to all prescription contraceptives.”

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

ADDICTION SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Dave Reilly from Hanmer in my riding for this petition.

“Save ‘the Spot’ Supervised Consumption Site....”

“Whereas Sudbury’s overdose death rate is three times the rate of the rest of Ontario;

“Whereas an application was submitted to the government in 2021 for funding of a supervised consumption site in Sudbury called the Spot;

“Whereas the Spot is operated by Réseau Access Network with municipal funding that” ended “on December 31, 2023, the province must approve funding very soon, or the Spot will close putting many people at risk of death;

“Whereas in 2023 alone, the Spot had 1,000 visits, reversed all 17 on-site overdoses, provided drug-checking services and prevented many deaths;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“Immediately approve funding for the supervised consumption site in Sudbury to save lives.”

I agree with this petition. I will affix my name to it and ask my good page Mesapé to bring it to the Clerk.

LABOUR LEGISLATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Rheel Lemay from Garson in my riding for this petition. It reads as follows:

“Enact Anti-Scab Labour Law....”

“Whereas strikes and lockouts are rare: on average, 97% of collective agreements are negotiated without work disruption; and

“Whereas anti-replacement workers laws have existed in Quebec since 1978, in British Columbia since 1993, and in Ontario under the NDP government, it was repealed by the Harris Conservative government;

“Whereas anti-scab legislation has reduced the length and divisiveness of labour disputes; and

“Whereas the use of scab labour during a strike or lockout is damaging to the social fabric of a community in the short and long term, as well as the well-being of its residents;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To pass the anti-scab labour bill to ban the use of replacement workers during a strike or lockout.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my name to it and ask James to bring it to the Clerk.

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Kathy Moggy from Val Caron in my riding for this petition.

“Improve Winter Road Maintenance....”

“Whereas highways play a critical role in northern Ontario;

“Whereas winter road maintenance has been privatized in Ontario and contract standards are not being enforced;

“Whereas per capita, fatalities are twice as likely to occur on a northern highway than on a highway in southern Ontario;

1520

“Whereas current MTO classification negatively impacts the safety of northern highways;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To classify Highways 11, 17, 69, 101 and 144 as class 1 highways; require that the pavement be bare within eight hours of the end of a snowfall and bring the management of winter road maintenance back into the public sector, if contract standards are not met.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my name to it and ask my good page Charles to bring it to the Clerk.

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 5, 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 Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): When we last debated Bill 157, the member for Hamilton Mountain had the floor. She still has time on the clock.

I recognize the member for Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Good afternoon, everyone. Yes, I definitely had the floor when we last debated Bill 157 this morning.

I want to start with a quick update. Bill 157 is titled the Enhancing Access to Justice Act. New Democrats have worked hard throughout the committee process to encourage the government to see a way forward to actually answer the calls of our community partners as well as our constituents.

We have definitely seen so many cuts across the province, in pretty much every ministry, that hurt our public sector and hurt the people of our province. It has put people in precarious positions. We see a housing crisis that is completely out of control, something none of us have ever seen in our lifetime, as well as our parents or grandparents—have ever seen the state of our communities.

We have an opioid crisis that is compounding those issues. Unfortunately, a lot of those same individuals are the ones who are ending up in our court system—no fault of their own. They are now addicted to opioids or any other street drugs. If you've taken the time in your community to visit some of these encampments and talk to some people, you will definitely see very clearly the effects that these drugs are having on their person; it's very visible. And we know that many of these people who are entering our court system are some of these same folks.

So that leads me—

Interjections.

Miss Monique Taylor: They're really loud over there, in the corner. I can barely hear myself think.

It encompasses so many issues that we see, right?

Today's paper—we're talking about plasma. People can donate plasma and get paid for it in the lowest economic riding in the entire province, in Hamilton Centre. These same folks tried it 10 years ago, and now they're back at it again, and they've literally pinpointed it down to the postal codes of where they want to put this shop to have people sell their plasma—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: To prey on them.

Miss Monique Taylor: So it's a prey on our most vulnerable citizens.

We've seen the way that access to naloxone, a life-saving drug, in our community has changed. We have community partners that are begging the government to please see what they've done. At the slip of a pen, they've changed the exact way that people can access Narcan in our communities. There was zero consultation. There was zero notice. It was literally done and gone. And now our community is struggling to be able to get these life-saving drugs.

I bring these things up, Speaker, because like I said, these are the same people who are entering our system.

I visited our city hall on the weekend, and there was a protest—homeless site set up. They were protesting the fact of—it's a city issue with the parking lot and housing. The woman who was actually leading this protest—her son died by an overdose. He was homeless. He died of an overdose. Her sister, her little brother also died by overdose—and he did this so in the jail.

So when we're talking about access to justice, we need to make sure that there is justice for all individuals in our system. And these are the same people who need to access the legal aid system, which this government has underfunded and cut for years and has put in a precarious position. These are the same people who are sitting in jail cells—or they're getting let out on bail because the jail cells are full, because our court systems cannot take the load any longer. This is years of underfunding. This is years of lack of capital input to ensure that the buildings are safe from mould, and other things that we have heard for reasons that courtrooms have been shut down. We have heard of staff retention and people not wanting to stay within the court system, which is causing major delays and a complete breakdown of our justice system.

Caught in the middle of that broken justice system are victims—victims who are not seeing their day in court for their perpetrator because time has ran out. When we have time running out on sexual assaults, on break-ins, on some pretty severe crimes in our community, that is putting those same perpetrators back out on the street.

So whether the Premier wants to think that it's about the judicial system and the judges who make this decision—he's so wrong. It's not the judges' decisions that are crashing our court system; it's the lack of funding and the people's ability to be able to keep our court system running.

So we have a major problem. That's why, as I'm reading through—first of all, a great title: Enhancing Access to Justice Act. And yet, really, where is the enhancement in this bill that people are asking for? They're asking for funding for our women's shelters. They're asking for intimate partner violence to be called femicide. It's the number one recommendation from the Renfrew inquest—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: They called it an epidemic.

Miss Monique Taylor: They called it an epidemic.

There were 86 recommendations made there. They were to provide a road map—and this is right from the site—to preventing intimate partner violence from escalating to femicide. The verdict shone a light on the systemic underfunding of front-line supports and glaring gaps in our justice system.

The number one recommendation—they can't even do it—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: They refuse.

Miss Monique Taylor: They refuse to call it an epidemic. I think I read in something somewhere, in one of these—it said there have been 62 recorded femicides in Ontario. That is 62 people whose lives were taken by violence. One femicide is too many; 62 femicides is an epidemic.

When we're doing bills that have titles like Enhancing Access to Justice Act, the least they could have done was ensure that language was built into this legislation to save women's lives. We know that if 62 people had died in any form or fashion, it would be the biggest cry ever—but women die, and they're silent. It's sad.

I have a motion from December 21, 2023, from the office of the mayor of the city of Hamilton. The member from Flamborough–Glanbrook would have received this—her name is on this; as well as the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, as he's from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek. The member from Flamborough–Glanbrook, of course, is part of the city. MPP Sarah Jama; Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas, my seatmate Ms. Sandy Shaw—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Let's not name the people, please.

1530

Miss Monique Taylor: Sorry. Of course.

It reads:

“Dear members of provincial Parliament for Hamilton-based ridings:

“At its meeting on August 18, 2023, Hamilton city council passed a motion respecting the ‘Declaration of Gender-Based Violence and Intimate-Partner Violence as an epidemic in the city of Hamilton.’ By way of this email, I would like to forward the contents of that motion for your awareness.

“The motion is as follows”—I might have to actually read a couple and then get to the whereases because it's quite long, and I only have six minutes on the clock left. Time goes fast around here.

“Whereas gender-based violence is defined as violence or abuse perpetrated against a woman, girl or gender-diverse individual because of their gender, gender expression, gender identity or perceived gender;

“Whereas according to the official 2023 UN Women statistics, globally, an estimated one in three women have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner, non-partner violence or both at least once in their life (30% of women aged 15 and older);

“Whereas, globally, according to the same report, there is a woman or girl being killed every 11 minutes in their home;

“Whereas femicide is a result of gender-based violence and 22 countries specifically reference it in their criminal legislation;

“Whereas Canada does not currently include the term femicide in their criminal legislation;

“Whereas Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people experience higher rates of gender-based violence;

“Whereas Indigenous women are more likely than non-Indigenous women to experience sexual assault at a younger age;

“Whereas transgender and gender-diverse people are significantly more likely to have experienced physical or sexual assault at least once since 15 years of age;

“Whereas the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability ... found that in Canada between 2018 and 2022 one woman was killed every 48 hours”—

come on, Speaker, to not have this included in legislation that's called the Enhancing Access to Justice Act is an absolute crime on its own. That would just add to the criminal investigations happening on the other side. It's actually quite interesting that they're bringing a bill forward such as this when the RCMP are investigating the government at the exact same time. It's kind of like smoke and mirrors in the Ontario Legislature once again.

I'm going to jump quickly to the “Therefore, be it resolved” part because I'm sure everybody has the picture here of how awful of an epidemic this truly is—“(a) That council declare gender-based violence and intimate partner violence an epidemic in Hamilton;

“(b) That staff meet with the Women Abuse Working Group ... to develop recommendations that will further address gender-based violence and intimate partner violence in Hamilton;

“(c) That staff be authorized to provide one-time funding in the amount of \$30,129.00 from the City Enrichment Fund ... to support the Women Abuse Working Group”—because the city has to pay for it, because the provincial government refuses. It's not in here; that was my adding—“to further identify and help address service gaps;

“(d) That staff continue to actively engage with the Hamilton just recovery coalition and their recommendations to identify further actions;

“(e) That staff continue to work closely with the community safety and well-being system leadership table to increase awareness of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence and explore opportunities for further action;

“(f) That council, by way of a letter from the mayor, and staff continue to actively engage with the province of Ontario to advocate for sustainable investments that meaningfully address gender-based violence and intimate partner”—that was the part that really does affect us here.

I'm going to leave the rest because I am running out of time and there are other things that I really want to be able to say—and that is: We can do better as a province. When we are turning a blind eye to our most vulnerable citizens—when a woman is in an abusive situation, it is so hard for her to be able to leave that situation. She has children. She has bills. How is she going to pay the rent? How is she going to be able to afford to do this? Many men can be very manipulating, so she has no credit. How is she possibly going to do this? Who's going to pay for everything? It compounds. To have the guts to actually stand up and say, “I'm out,” and then leave with her kids, drive to the nearest shelter and realize that the doors are locked because there are no beds—what is she supposed to do then?

Visiting one of our shelters—they tell us they makeshift beds on the floor in some of the rooms just to make space. I see members shaking their heads over there. If you're shaking your head, tell your Premier to do the right thing: Fund our women's shelters. Ensure that they have safety, that there is somewhere for them to go—somewhere. Funding from the 1990s is the funding base level that

they're at—imagine, the 1990s. You talk about inflation, you talk about the cost of everything, but you don't fund our services to ensure that they can take care of our communities and that we can have healthy communities. Start with the basics. Make sure we're proactive, that we're actively looking into ways to help our community instead of trying to figure out a way to stack the deck against them.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Stack the courts.

Miss Monique Taylor: You've already stacked the deck, and now you're stacking the courts against them.

We can do better as a province. This bill could have done so much better to ensure that we had a real, truly safe ability to enhance access to justice in the province of Ontario, and not just more smoke and mirrors and great titles. No great title is going to save one person. Real action is going to save people. It's your turn to do that.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to questions.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I want to congratulate the member. I thought that was a wonderful speech, coming from her heart and very passionate.

Obviously, women in shelters is a passion of mine. I had the opportunity to be the minister responsible for women's issues and community and social services, and one of the first things that I did was make some investments into that area.

I've really heard a lot about violence against women and the resettlement, and I agree with her 100% that if a woman is prepared to leave, we need to make sure that there are supports.

I didn't hear a lot about sex trafficking, and that's one area that I've been very concerned about. There is a very specialized group of people who have to support them outside of the existing shelter system. I think that's an area where I want to continue to focus. Again, I wouldn't mind hearing a little bit more from her about human trafficking, or as I call it, "sex trafficking: Ontario's dirty little secret."

I again congratulate her for passion. We need more of that on the floor of this assembly.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member.

Yes, we should all be passionate when we talk in this House—and sex trafficking is no different.

I've seen recent articles about big cases being brought down and the work of specialized teams in our police forces who are really doing that hard work. I need to say thank you to them for doing that work. It's not easy to go home to your own family and children at the end of the day after seeing some of the most horrific things that people with minds that we can't explain do to our children, and how they can exploit women. We need better legislation to ensure that we're protecting them and that there are more tools to be able to conquer this and to challenge it so that no one—male, female—is put up for sale in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I would first like to say what enormous pride that I have to sit beside my colleague the MPP for

Hamilton Mountain and to see the fantastic work every day in our community of Hamilton, how hard she works, and that passion is on display all the time. I'm proud of your work and I'm proud to sit beside you, sister.

I'm going to ask you: There are 19 schedules here in this bill that's purporting to enhance justice, and we proposed 11 amendments. The government turned them all down. Two of the amendments were very specifically speaking to what you've been talking about.

One is that the legal aid funding should be increased so that people have access to legal aid, particularly when it comes to the women that you've talked about, that when they do get to court, they're already struggling. And the second thing is, the government members voted down an amendment that would have improved funding to rape crisis and sexual assault support centres.

Do you want to speak a little more about how this bill is a failure when it comes to actually enhancing justice for women in this province?

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Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to my seatmate, because we're a good team over here and definitely are able to feed off of each other in the work that we do in Hamilton together.

There is so much more that could have been done in this bill to ensure that there really was public safety. Look at Bill 74. Bill 74 was a bill to help vulnerable people when they're missing, which this government didn't even allow me the ability to debate. They took it and they stuck it in the justice committee, never to see the light of day again.

That's true work that we can be doing for real justice for people, to ensure that we're bringing people home safely. That's all within the justice act. There's so much more that could be done to ensure that our communities are healthier and safer, but this bill kind of missed that opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank the member for their statement. She talked about going back to the basics. My background is under the child protection act, and that was just a short year and a half ago, two years ago. One of the things that was prevalent for me was the victims and not giving them the amount of rights that they required. And this actually proposes the Victims' Bill of Rights, which makes changes that empower victims to go after the offender for bodily harm, for distress, for harm, for hate crimes. Do you not think that that is a positive step, where they can go after the bad actors?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you very much for the question. During committee, the government members voted down an NDP amendment that would have required the Attorney General to make 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 access to their available, publicly funded programs.

So we put forward suggestions. We try to help, but anything that comes from any other members of this House, unless they're Conservative, gets shot down in an instant. We could make really good policy and we could make really great decisions for the people of Ontario if we actually took each other's ideas instead of just beating each other up because we're from a different party.

We were all elected to represent our constituents. Working together, we would probably come up with some really good policies.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

M^{me} France Gélinas: As you mentioned, during committee for Bill 157, the government members voted down an amendment that we had brought forward for helping with the hiring and the retention of courtroom staff.

You've mentioned and made it clear that our courts are in crisis. Serious criminal cases are being dismissed because they just take too long. We're talking about fire-arms possession. We're talking about impaired driving. We're talking about sexual assault. Does the member think that the government has done everything they could to reduce courtroom delays with this bill?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member from Nickel Belt. No, we absolutely know that that's not the case. There are so many issues within our court system being able to retain that staff and to be able to do that work. They refuse to listen, and that's where it comes back to, again, that good ideas come from all places, and typically our ideas come from the public. We don't typically make this stuff up. We talk to stakeholders. They bring us their ideas and we change them into recommendations, or we've listened to them throughout the committee process. They're the ones who bring forward the ideas. We put them forward to the government, and the government just shuts them down.

It's so unfortunate because we truly could fix so many things if we actually just worked together instead of the "gotcha" and instead of, "It's a New Democrat idea, so we can't listen to those lefties." That's just wrong, and this is what we hear coming out of this government, and particularly the Premier.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Another question?

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Thank you to the member opposite for her passionate speech. I know a lot of what she was touching upon was a lack of funding or a perceived lack of funding. I just wanted to touch base on our \$1.4 billion that we put towards gender-based violence and just allow her to comment on it, as well as the \$18 million more that we just signed on with our federal counterpart, the Ontario-STANDS against gender-based violence that was just announced recently. As well, the minister was up in Kenora opening a third anti-human trafficking CARE unit, part of our \$307-million plan towards anti-human trafficking.

I'd just like for you to be able to touch upon that, because I know you were speaking about what you perceive as underfunding. Could you touch upon those numbers, please?

Miss Monique Taylor: Yes, our systems are underfunded. If you talk to any public service sector in this province, they are all underfunded. We have groups that are just on the brink of collapse because they're not able to pay the bills. We have children's aid societies that are running deficits that they're not allowed to run because they're so underfunded; the formula is so broken.

And so we put forward amendments, again, at committee, but the government refused to listen to it. The government committee members voted against an NDP amendment that would have required the Attorney General to make a plan to increase the amount of funding to Ontario's rape crisis centres, sexual assault support centres and domestic violence support centres. The Ford government stopped renewing a \$1-million funding boost to rape crisis centres in 2020.

We continue to put out the ideas. They continue to come back with smoke and mirrors. They're talking about the billions of dollars, whatever they're putting out now. They're making up for Bill 124 for most public sectors, and so that's where that funding is coming and going into. It's not going into the capital that they need to survive—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. That's time.

We're going to move to further debate. I recognize the member for Carleton.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to rise in the House today to continue debate on the Enhancing Access to Justice Act, 2024. 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 of Ontario.

I'd like to share an article that was written by QP Briefing. This article was written on November 30 of 2023. The headline says, "Omnibus Crime Bill Makes It Easier for Victims to Sue Offenders, Eliminates Mandatory Coroners' Inquests into Construction Deaths."

"As part of a sweeping omnibus bill to be tabled today, the Ontario government wants to make it easier for victims of certain crimes to sue offenders for emotional distress without reliving the experience in the courts.

"The Enhancing Access to Justice Act, announced ... by Solicitor General Michael Kerzner and Attorney General Doug Downey, would also ban cannabis cultivation in homes offering child care services....

"As the cornerstone of the bill, amendments to the Victims' Bill of Rights will make it easier for victims to sue offenders in civil court for emotional distress and

bodily harm, including human trafficking offences, terrorism and hate crimes targeting places of worship.

“According to Ontario Attorney General Doug Downey, under the proposed changes, victims of these crimes will no longer have to prove they experienced emotional distress in civil court, instead the distress will be assumed by the courts.

“‘When you go to prove your civil suit, you have to show there was a negative effect emotionally or otherwise,’ said Downey. ‘There are classes of incidents that it’s quite clear there would be an effect.

“‘We don’t want them going back through that process to explain to a judge how they were emotionally traumatized and in the process retraumatize them.’”

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This legislation will also ban home-based daycares from growing cannabis. It will “ban the cultivation of cannabis in homes that offer child care services, whether they are licensed or unlicensed child care providers.

“‘As it stands, cannabis can be grown in home-based child care facilities,’ said Doug Downey. ‘Quite frankly I never imagined we would even have to legislate this.’ ...

“Other changes include giving firefighters the power to issue fines—or administrative monetary penalties—for certain violations, new rules to allow courts to better handle vexatious litigants, strengthening bail rules for high-risk offenders and limiting delays at child protection trials.”

Madam Speaker, the reason that I shared this article with you from QP Briefing is that I want to send a clear message to the members in this Legislature and to Ontarians that this is not coming from us. This is coming from an independent media outlet, QP Briefing, that is talking about the positive impact and the positive changes that Bill 157 is going to have in this province, if passed.

The province is increasing access to justice for victims by making changes to the Victims’ Bill of Rights, 1995, and its regulation to allow victims to sue for emotional distress and related bodily harm for more crimes, including terrorism, motor vehicle theft, human trafficking-related offences and hate-related crimes targeting places of worship.

And before I continue, Madam Speaker, because I do only have five minutes left, I’d like to mention that I will be sharing my time with the wonderful member for Oakville North–Burlington.

Our government is also proposing the following consultations: with the federal government to discuss removing limitation periods on civil lawsuits under the Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act that are commenced in Ontario, and with law enforcement across governments and stakeholders to further protect Ontarians from auto theft, including examining VIN-related fraud and catalytic converter theft.

This bill will also strengthen Ontario’s cannabis framework. We’re proposing legislative changes that, if passed, would further Ontario’s priorities to combat the illegal cannabis market, keep communities safe and protect children and youth.

Now, I do have to mention, Madam Speaker, it is so important that our government made sure that we have a robust system when it comes to how the cannabis market works in Ontario, because if we want to detract and combat the black market and the illegal cannabis market and keep our communities safe, we have to ensure that we have a proper framework for people to buy cannabis legally. And that’s exactly what we have done, and I’m proud to be part of a government that has made sure that we have a robust system and framework in place.

Now, having said that, I personally have not done it. If I did, my father would probably ground me, even though I’m a 39-year-old MPP. But—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You’re not that old.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I’m turning 39 next month—or this month, actually. At the end of March, I’m turning 39. But I can tell you now that I still have not and probably never will walk into a cannabis store with my father, because if I did, he would probably ground me. I might be the member for Carleton, but my dad is the father of the member for Carleton. I might be MPP Ghamari; he’s Mr. Ghamari.

But having said that, Madam Speaker, it’s so important that we are able to have these conversations and that we give people a safe place to talk about this. The fact that people are able to buy recreational cannabis in a safe place and have it be regulated is so important. I in fact toured Tweed when Tweed was still operating in Smiths Falls and I saw the stringent measures imposed in how they controlled it, how they regulated it in Health Canada. As a government, one of the most responsible things we can do is to ensure that the cannabis market is properly regulated in such a way that we’re combatting the illegal market. That’s why this bill is so important, and I hope that everyone supports this piece of legislation.

We’re also expanding options for fire safety enforcement. We’re proposing changes to the Fire Protection and Prevention Act to enhance enforcement and compliance by enabling the future development of an administrative monetary penalty framework.

We’re also strengthening the bail system. We need to strengthen our bail system to ensure that high-risk and repeat violent offenders comply with their bail conditions. In September, in fact, we launched the intensive serious violent crime bail teams. These teams provide dedicated crown attorneys and business professionals with expertise to work with police province-wide on bail matters involving serious and violent crimes, including firearm offences and serious repeat offenders.

I’ve spoken about terrorism a few times and how this piece of legislation is going to make it easier to combat terrorism. I’ve spoken several times in the Legislature and outside of this Legislature about the terrorist Islamic regime in Iran and how they influence Canadian society. I’m very proud to be part of a government that takes the threats of terrorism seriously, because my parents came to Canada in 1986 to escape a terrorist, Islamofascist regime. They came here because they wanted to live in a free and democratic society.

We respect our democratic institutions. We respect our democratic values, and as legislators, it is our responsibility and duty to make sure that we protect our democracy. That is why it is so important to support this piece of legislation. It is so important to support Bill 157, because the measures that we are putting in place are making sure that we are keeping Ontario not just free, but safe and secure.

That is why I am proud of this government. I am proud to work with Premier Ford under his leadership and support this piece of important legislation. I will be voting for Bill 157, and I hope everyone in this House will as well.

Now I will give the rest of my time to my colleague, the member from Oakville North–Burlington.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I recognize the member from Oakville North–Burlington.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Good afternoon. I rise today to speak on third reading of Bill 157, the Enhancing Access to Justice Act, 2023, and share some of the reasons why I am supporting it. I'm pleased to be sharing my time with the hard-working member from Carleton.

As has been said by the Attorney General and others, this bill, if passed, will improve access to justice for more victims of crime, improve community safety and modernize and simplify the court and its operations. As someone who is a strong advocate for victims of crime, I am pleased to support this bill, as it represents a positive step forward to assist people to better access justice.

First, let me say a few words about public safety and access to justice for victims of crime. Keeping our communities safe and increasing access to justice for victims of crime is a key priority for me and for this government. Ontario's justice system needs to be accessible and responsible to all Ontarians, especially those who need it most. That's 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, three types of crimes are identified in the Victims' Bill of Rights where a victim can sue the convicted offender for emotional distress. These crimes include assault by a spouse, sexual assault, and attempted sexual assault. Our government is proposing to expand this list to include victims of human trafficking, victims of sexual offences against a minor or a person with a disability, and the publication or distribution of a voyeuristic recording or an intimate image without that person's consent.

Speaker, as my colleagues here today will know, in November 2022 I introduced a private member's motion titled Keira's Law in the Ontario Legislature. This motion was named after four-year-old Keira, who tragically lost her life as a result of an apparent murder-suicide. It was unanimously passed in this House, and it called for the education and training in intimate partner violence and coercive control for provincial court judges and other professionals in the Family Court system.

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Since then, our government has taken further action. We've passed the Strengthening Safety and Modernizing

Justice Act, which now mandates that all newly appointed and existing provincial court judges and justices of the peace must undertake education and training in gender-based intimate partner violence and coercive control.

These amendments were largely thanks to the tireless advocacy of Jennifer Kagan, Keira's mother, and the hundreds of women who shared their stories and provided their support for Keira's Law.

But we haven't stopped there. Our government has zero tolerance for violence against women and children in all its forms. We've invested nearly \$247 million to support victims of violence and almost \$29 million in violence prevention initiatives. We've invested \$5.9 million over two years through the Victim Support Grant Program to enhance capacity to support survivors of intimate partner violence and human trafficking. And late last year, the Attorney General announced a one-time \$2.13-million investment to the Partner Assault Response Program, to supplement the annual \$10.6-million allocation.

People in my community of Oakville North–Burlington are already seeing this funding in action. From 2022 to 2023, Halton Women's Place received about \$2.5 million in funding to deliver emergency shelter services under the violence against women program, the Transitional and Housing Support Program, and the Family Court Support Worker Program. Additionally, at the end of 2023, SAVIS, Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Services of Halton, received \$98,600 to implement an overnight crisis line to offer immediate support for volunteers and service users. And \$100,000 was given directly to the Halton Regional Police Service's human trafficking unit.

There is well-documented evidence that victims of these crimes can experience long-term effects, like post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and other mental health challenges. We continue to listen to victims like those in Keira's family, and through Bill 157 we are making the key changes that will increase their access to justice. These proposed amendments will make it easier for victims to sue their offenders for emotional distress in civil court.

Speaker, our government recognizes the serious nature of these crimes, and we are taking action.

Let me focus for a moment on the steps we are taking and, through this bill, proposing to ensure that Ontario's justice system and laws meet the demands of the 21st century.

Together with the judiciary and all partners across the justice system, we continue to harness new and existing technologies to improve and expand access to many different services.

Our goal has always been clear: to facilitate a modern and accessible justice system that works for everyone. Ontarians deserves nothing less.

About a year ago, we officially opened the new Ontario Court of Justice building in Toronto. This new courthouse brings most of our criminal court services from six different Ontario Court of Justice locations into one accessible, state-of-the-art courthouse. It accommodates virtual and hybrid hearings, and it has conference settlement rooms and enhanced security features. It can accommodate the

unique needs of drug treatment, Gladue services, youth and mental health court users, and provides supports for victims.

Our government is also in the midst of rolling out expanded digital justice solutions to deliver more justice services online. Digital transformation in the justice sector is long overdue, and we are succeeding in our efforts to make 21st-century technology a permanent fixture in the administration of justice in Ontario. The Courts Digital Transformation Initiative is an important and significant milestone in this new era for justice in Ontario and will be the most significant single step forward in the digital evolution of justice in Canada.

In 2021, our government launched the Justice Accelerated strategy to break down long-standing barriers in the system and move more services online and closer to Ontarians regardless of where they lived. This includes rural, northern and First Nations communities. Since then, we have:

- expanded electronic filing to more than 700 types of civil, family, bankruptcy, divisional court and small claims court documents through Justice Services Online;

- committed \$65 million to virtual and hybrid hearings;

- expanded our online court case search tool to ensure the public can search basic court information in select civil and active criminal cases without having to line up at or call a courthouse; and

- substantially increased funding for Community Legal Education Ontario.

As the Attorney General says, this is the way of the future, and it's what the people of this province deserve. As a lawyer myself, I welcome this change.

Yet despite all of our advances, some of Ontario's court processes remain outdated, leading to inefficiencies and challenges for court users. That's why we are putting forward proposals in this bill to change the Courts of Justice Act and other statutes, creating flexibility and filling current gaps in procedures. We are also proposing changes to make the procedures for judges in the Court of Appeal and Superior Court of Justice to deal with vexatious litigants more flexible to help reduce the use of court resources and delays. These vexatious litigants rob our courts of time and resources which are better used for legitimate attempts to resolve disputes.

As the minister said when this bill was introduced, if passed, the Enhancing Access to Justice Act will ensure that Ontario's justice system remains fair, remains responsive and remains accessible for those who need it the most, while continuing to keep people safe. I encourage all of my colleagues in the House to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to questions.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you to the two members who talked about this bill—in particular, in referencing to violence against women.

We used to have a program in Ontario called the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. Under that program, victims, survivors of these violent acts would get up to \$30,000 in compensation, including \$5,000 for pain

and suffering. But the Ford government removed that program and replaced it with the Victim Quick Response Program+, which means victims don't get as much. There's also a timeline of filing an application within 45 days of the crime for emergency expenses, and only up to six months to file for counselling. A lot of these victims under this new program would only receive—the majority of them—\$1,000 funding. In committee, the NDP asked this government to increase those amounts, because I hear the concerns.

I certainly don't question their motives around this bill, but why would the government vote down increasing that compensation for their new Victim Quick Response Program+? It isn't a replacement to sue someone civilly—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We're going to ask the member for Oakville North–Burlington to answer the question.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you very much to the member opposite. I know that you also feel very strongly about issues as they impact women and children and domestic violence.

There has never been a government in Ontario that has done more to support women and children, particularly in this particular vulnerable area.

As you know, the Ontario government is investing an additional \$18.7 million this year to prevent and address violence against women and girls. This is in addition to the amount of \$247 million that I mentioned in my remarks.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Ms. Laura Smith: I want to thank the member from Oakville North–Burlington for providing that compelling information.

We are seeing a rise in hate-motivated crimes, and you touched on those. In my area of Thornhill, which is in York region, the police have listed a 200% increase in hate crimes this year. Toronto Police Service has listed similar numbers, with 40% of all hate crimes being reported as cases of anti-Semitism, which is, sadly, something that my neighbourhood faces.

That's why this bill is so necessary to promote safer communities.

Can the member from Oakville North–Burlington please advise how this proposed legislation would bring those who commit hate-motivated crimes to justice?

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Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you to the member for Thornhill.

I think that many of us in this House share the concern of this rise in hate. Hate has absolutely no place here in the province or in Canada. This is something that both the Attorney General and the Solicitor General have said many times, as well as the Premier, and we all support initiatives to be able to mitigate acts of hate.

What we've been doing is, through the Victims' Bill of Rights, allowing victims to sue their convicted offender for emotional distress caused by certain crimes. We are proposing to add the following new crimes for which a victim can sue for emotional stress. They include:

- terrorism;

—faith-based related crimes that we already had included in this section—will now also be able to apply to clergy and/or religious worship;
 —motor vehicle theft;
 —sexual offences against minors and other offences not already included;
 —human-trafficking-related offences not already included; and
 —violent crimes and other offences causing a threat to personal safety—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you.

Next question.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to thank the member for her great speech.

I have a question, and I think I know the answer to it—at least the first part: Does the member believe that finance, the ability to pay, should be a barrier to justice in Ontario? And if she doesn't believe that, which I'm sure she doesn't believe, why won't her government properly fund and increase legal aid so that everyone has access to the justice they deserve?

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you very much to the member opposite for that question.

One of the things I would like to say, particularly as a lawyer who used to actually practise using legal aid certificates, is that this is the only government in the last 25 years that has made significant changes to support legal aid. The hourly fee structure for roster lawyers had not been changed in 25 years. The hourly rates and block fee rates had not been increased since 2015. This is the very first investment in nearly a decade. It's the first increase since October 2023. A second increase will come into effect on April 1, 2024, and the third increase will come into effect on April 1, 2025, to be able to support those individuals who are working in the legal aid field, because obviously it's important that all individuals be represented when they have issues before the courts.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The next question.

Ms. Donna Skelly: In my previous career, I spent a lot of time in courtrooms covering stories involving criminal acts. Far too often, the focus was on the criminal and not on the victim.

This particular piece of legislation is proposing changes to a Victims' Bill of Rights—back in 1995—that will give victims the ability to sue convicted offenders for emotional distress and related bodily harm for crimes of terrorism, motor vehicle theft and hate crimes targeting religious groups, as well as sexual offences and human trafficking.

I want to ask the member from Oakville North–Burlington why it is important, in her opinion, for our government to bring these changes forward and how they will impact the lives of victims.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you to my colleague.

I think that's what is important here—to recognize that the victim is usually traumatized as it is when acts of

violence occur, and it's so important for us to be able to actually listen to victims and be able to address their emotional and physical trauma.

Introducing this legislation will actually make it easier for victims of crime, whether it's terrorism, whether it's human trafficking, whether it is individuals who themselves have experienced sexual violence—to give them an opportunity to seek a civil remedy through the courts and not have to go back and relitigate the trauma they faced. For us, these proposed changes really go at the heart of remaining fair and responsive, and listening to victims who've experienced this kind of traumatized violence.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: We have been seeing in this province some shocking moves by this government to politicize judicial candidates. Recently, the Premier made disturbing statements about his desire to increase political influence over judicial candidates. He wanted like-minded judges. His comments have caused alarm in the legal community and absolutely lowered the public's trust in Ontario's justice system.

During committee, this government could have taken a step to reverse this damage by voting for an NDP amendment that would improve the independence of the judicial appointments committee, but this government voted that down.

The entire legal community is completely disturbed by this attack on the judicial system and a tenet of our democracy.

As a lawyer, is this disturbing to you? And why do you think this government didn't support that amendment at committee?

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you to the member opposite for that question.

I do think that you're crying wolf a little too much, and let me explain to you why. Committees provide to the Attorney General advice on applicants for possible judicial appointments, and the practice for decades has been that the Attorney General makes appointment decisions at their own discretion and recommends to cabinet.

Two members in question here are two of several on this committee, including three judges.

Under previous governments, members of committees donated thousands of dollars to political parties, including the Liberal Party.

We will continue to appoint judges through public and in-depth recruitment processes. I emphasize that this process is separate from the independence of judges, once appointed to their positions. And I am very happy with the process, as a lawyer.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to further debate.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm very pleased to be able to stand in my place as the proud member representing Oshawa in this House.

Actually, it's an important conversation that we've been having. We're discussing Bill 157, the so-called Enhancing Access to Justice Act. This is a significantly sized

bill, in that it has 19 schedules, 19 separate areas of focus in this bill. It's possible to agree with lots of stuff that the government does and still have more to pull—because this is a missed opportunity. When you title a bill the Enhancing Access to Justice Act, I think people might get their hopes up, especially those thousands and thousands of people who are standing in a queue or waiting for their day in court, so to speak, waiting for their tribunal hearing, hoping that they can have legal support or some guidance through our chaotic systems. I say “chaotic” not to undermine them, but I think right now, we've seen such a degradation in our systems. And I'll speak about that later—especially our tribunal system.

We're at a point that if the government doesn't really listen to the folks who are giving them good advice on how to make things better, we're going to see things get really bad, even worse than they are now, and quickly. So, Speaker, what we have here, we have a bill—and I think I'm going to stand here, as a New Democrat, and say hopefully all of us, but certainly those of us on this side believe that everyone in Ontario deserves equal access to justice.

There have been years of this government; the government before, which was the same government; the government before that, which some days I feel like it's the same government—they have underfunded and cut programs that have left Ontario's court system in crisis. There are unprecedented delays and a massive court case backlog. We have seen cases, and the member who serves as our justice critic shared some very tough-to-listen-to stories about people whose cases have not had their day in court, and the perpetrators of very violent and terrible acts against them have been allowed to walk free.

1620

That speaks to the problem in our court system because cases, including those involving the sexual assault of a minor, impaired driving and other serious, violent acts, are being thrown out because they're moving too slowly through the courts. Many courtrooms are closed due to staffing shortages, others due to poor states of repair. Some are actually physically falling apart. There's a range of challenges.

The Conservatives have dramatically cut legal aid and made it even harder for many Ontarians to access justice.

As I said, there are 19 schedules in this bill. Unfortunately, they fail to address some of the biggest challenges, not to say that they don't address some of the pieces. There are some—I will say random, and that's not even to diminish them, but there's kind of a smattering of changes. I'm curious to know who requested some of them, because when we hear stakeholder groups across the province clamouring for change and support, those big issues are not addressed in this piece of legislation.

I would say the bill is disappointing. It touches on many issues that desperately need improvement, but it doesn't meet the moment to address and fix those issues that the bill mentions. It recognizes that people are talking about it, but here we don't see the fixes.

I will say, as I mentioned, that our justice system is in crisis. A case having to do with sexual assault of a minor

and, as I said, drunk driving and other violence—they're moving too slowly through the court system, so they have been thrown out, sometimes due to closed courtrooms.

I will say that the minister responsible for this file—this is not his first day. This is a minister who I will give credit where credit is due—there are some members over there for whom I wouldn't be so quick to say this, but this particular minister is bright and capable of understanding these challenges. So I do believe that the minister knows how complicated these challenges are. We would hope that by this point in the journey with this government, we were further along to fixing them, especially when many solutions have been offered.

The government has been making some financial investments, for example, in the tribunal system. And yet, it's so bad. It's the worst that we've seen it. So money isn't quite enough when we're dealing with systemic challenges.

Speaker, one of the things that I would like to talk about as we're standing here debating a bill called Enhancing Access to Justice Act—folks in our community right now have been seized with the story of the Premier now quadrupling down—is it still only quadrupling? Has he quintupled yet?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Quintuple hasn't happened.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: No? Okay—but doubling down, tripling down, quadrupling down on like-minded judges in the appointment of judges.

I'm going to read here from a piece. Law Times: “Legal groups voice concerns over”—I'll say Premier—“repeatedly saying he wants ‘like-minded’ judges.

“Advocates’ group, Criminal Lawyers’ Association, CCLA, and FOLA all fired back at the Premier.

“Several legal organizations have spoken out about Ontario Premier”—name—“repeated statements since last Friday that he wants the judicial appointment process to produce judges who are ideologically aligned with his Progressive Conservative government...

“We got elected to get like-minded people in appointments,” he said.”

Another quote from the Premier is, “I am not going to appoint some NDP or some Liberal. I have made it very clear where I stand with judges.”

Going on, he reiterated his support for like-minded judges and said, “We're going to triple-down on making sure communities are safe. I'm sick and tired of judges letting these people out on bail. We're going to hire tough judges. That's what we're doing.”

The Criminal Lawyers' Association reminds this government that, “Judicial independence is a cornerstone of our constitutional democracy.... We echo the concerns of other Ontario legal organizations and urge your government to appoint qualified, principled, impartial judges of the highest calibre regardless of political affiliation. Judges must be free to make fair and impartial decisions—often difficult decisions—without concern for whether or not their rulings align with the government of the day.”

Also, at the press conference where the Premier made the initial comments, he said that judges were releasing too

many criminal suspects on bail while their cases proceeded through the court system. He said that in every appointment, he is looking for “tough judges, tough JPs ... to keep guys in jail.”

“The Advocates’ Society’s letter said that a judge’s role is to apply the law to the facts of the case, not to implement government policies, such as being ‘soft’ or ‘tough’ on crime.

““To suggest otherwise violates the separation of powers ingrained in Canada’s constitutional order, and undermines the judiciary’s independence as the third, equal branch of government,” said the letter....

““In the view of the CCLA, it’s imperative that judicial appointments remain non-partisan and based on merit to ensure that the charter right to bail is implemented in a way that upholds the rule of law’....”

We’ve been sharing a lot of the reaction of the legal community in this room. I’ll say a favourite of mine is this: that the chair of the Federation of Ontario Legal Associations, Douglas Judson, had said, “For the legal community, the Premier’s comments reflect a ‘fundamental and, frankly, juvenile misapprehension’ of the importance of judicial independence to democracy....”

In FOLA’s statement on the Premier’s comments, “the organization urged” the government “to ‘de-politicize and return independence’....”

Speaker, what I found interesting about this story—beyond that it’s upsetting, and meddling in the judicial side of things is not what we’re supposed to do—is people in the community really don’t like this one. Folks who may or may not generally share their politics or have political opinions in their every day—because most people are too busy to tune into what happens in this space and place. A lot of folks out there are like, “What are they doing?” So they’ve pushed a button here.

Speaker, I will also return to what I had been talking about, with the experience of people in our community, those backlogs, the challenges. Here’s a letter that I got from David. David wrote: “Hello Jennifer,

“I have been trying to get an answer as to why the courthouse service counter hours are only 9-11 and 2-4?...

“I got to the courthouse today before 1:30 p.m., and there were already 12 people waiting for the counter to reopen at 2 p.m. But the stats won’t show the demand for this service because we all have to wait until 15 minutes before the counter opens to be able to get our ticket to wait for our turn to be served. Isn’t access to justice a right in Ontario?”

That is maybe a small piece of the big picture, but this is how this individual is experiencing it: standing in line to get help, and where’s the help? And where’s the answer to “Where’s the help?”

I’m sharing this as I had reached out, of course, to the Durham Community Legal Clinic. Our legal clinics in our communities—I imagine that all MPPs in this space have them on speed dial. We’re all connected to the legal clinics, because we do our best to serve people who come through our door, and many folks have many needs, and

we don’t give legal advice—except the Premier, but the rest of us don’t give legal advice.

As a preliminary point, I want to say, it’s important to note that community legal clinics are funded out of the general legal aid budget; they’re not funded separately, so the cuts of 2019 to the Legal Aid Ontario budget impacted clinics as well as other legal aid services.

1630

These are some points shared—we’d reached out to Patrick Gillespie, the executive director locally. He said, “In 2019, the provincial government cut its contribution to” Legal Aid Ontario “by one third, or approximately \$130 million ... clinics continue to strain due to underfunding. Particularly, clinics face a recruitment and retention crisis regarding their staff. Chronic underfunding is making it impossible for community clinics to hire and retain staff, particularly lawyers, who can be better compensated elsewhere.

“Clinics have been asking the provincial government and LAO for an infusion of additional resources to respond to this crisis.

“The LAO financial eligibility requirement is too low, forcing us to turn away many clients in need; however, the challenges with recruitment and retention pose a problem in addressing that need even if the financial eligibility rate was increased.”

Making it local, but probably you could extrapolate this to other communities in the province: “Durham region is one of the largest catchment areas in the province with an ever-growing population ... and service need; yet, it is served by only one clinic when much smaller areas have many more.”

As he had shared, “The move by the government and their ‘digital-first’ program to keep Landlord and Tenant Board tribunals online has had a negative impact on marginalized, elderly and low-income clients. This approach favours those who can afford technology.” Yes, technology as an option, great; technology as that’s all you’re allowed to get, no. We all are hearing that, and we know this.

Here’s a letter. This is a tenant in my community; her name is Jackie: “I am a 70-year-old resident of Oshawa, who has lived in basement unit of a five-plex in Oshawa....

“I have lived here for almost 17 years.

“Always pay my rent on time. Apartment is immaculate. I have done all painting of walls and ceilings, back-splash, put down new flooring all on my own and on my own dime.

“I have three cats, two very senior that have always lived here, and go outside with a cat door because there is a field next door that they love to go to or just lay on my front lawn.

“I am a perfect tenant, and have been helpful all through the years because the landlord is rarely here, and I’m the one to contact him if pipes burst, washing machine breaks etc.

“I was given this N12 notice in September”—I’m going to move forward here. “I did not move out of my apartment ... and the hearing for the tribunal has been scheduled” for

a date in April “through Zoom, which I have no idea about.” Just to replay, Jackie is 70 and is trying to live her life.

I will continue. Jackie has shared, “This is ridiculous and inhumane. What can be done about this? I will have to retain a lawyer for the tribunal meeting as I know nothing about Zoom meetings, and I will have an added expense for a lawyer.

“I feel I have grounds to fight this....

“Is there anything that can be done that you could advise or help me with? I have been sick with worry and stress for six months now, living in limbo, affecting my sleep, my livelihood, my job. Yes, I still work full-time....

“Thank you,” says Jackie.

There are lots of tenants with lots of experiences out there, and we’ve got a lot of people waiting in line at that tribunal.

This is a portion of a significant four-pager, and this is from Roxanne. She has written to me as an independent small landlord of one home/unit in regard to the Landlord and Tenant Board. She raises issues of lengthy waits of over a year, continued suffering by small landlords, abuse of the system, non-paying tenants allowed to appeal an eviction after failing to follow through on an order, tenants living in unsuitable homes that landlords refuse to repair, sheriffs are backed up for two months, as you are all aware. The list goes on and on.

I’m pulling just some highlights from Roxanne in the interest of time: “I own a home in Oshawa ... and have tenants occupying the premises....

“The arrears are now over \$25,000. The next hearing” was “January 23 ... for an issue that was already granted a resolution with consequences. Need I even say, is a time slot that could have been used for someone who actually needs an adjudicator to sort out a serious issue. For example, how many tenants are suffering at the hands of landlords that don’t know their legal obligations or are deliberately making the life of a good tenant difficult in hopes they will just move out so the landlord can now have new tenants, new lease, and charge more. These tenants are waiting upwards of two years for resolution to their problems while non-paying tenants get appeals and second and third hearing dates and are allowed to continue abuse of the service.”

Roxanne says, “Thousands of landlords losing their savings, their properties, their shirts and going into serious debt to hang on to a property they worked hard to acquire while a tenant can ... stay in a unit and pay nothing until it finally gets to the point where a landlord now has to spend more money they already don’t have to pay for a sheriff and have them physically removed. Granted, the sheriff is a last resort and not always needed but the four-to-six week wait for a sheriff tells me that it is used frequently enough for those ... tenants that just refuse to leave....”

Man, I feel for people who are living in this kind of chaos and limbo.

The sheriff circumstance—that’s two months that she has to wait for that. There’s only one in Oshawa, apparently. And it says, “I am now approaching two years of stress and waiting.”

That’s Roxanne. Roxanne was speaking as somebody who has one unit that they rent out, trying to make ends meet in a community. A lot of us have small landlords who are our neighbours. And we’re in a crisis of—we don’t have enough housing. If this government can’t fix the tribunal, how many people are going to leave the system and say, “I’m not renting my basement anymore”?

I’m basically out of time, because I had this whole report highlighted and ready to go from Tribunal Watch Ontario, but I will read this bit that they have said: “There is little justice to be found for Ontarians who have to turn to Ontario’s busiest tribunal—the Landlord and Tenant Board. The LTB has been failing badly since 2019, when the current government began removing its experienced adjudicators and moved the LTB under the leadership of Tribunals Ontario, a mega-cluster of tribunals. The deplorable situation at the LTB is not getting better. According to the most recent annual report from Tribunals Ontario, the situation is getting worse. The backlog of LTB applications has grown to over 53,000.

“Despite increased funding and more staff and more adjudicators than ever before, the delays remain crushing and the number of cases resolved each year has continued to drop.”

It goes on and says, “This begs the question: What is going wrong at the LTB?”

I’ve got nine pages to tell this government what is going wrong at the LTB, but I’d be willing to bet that the minister and the ministry already know, and that is why we should have seen those solutions in this piece of legislation or action from this government.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We’re going to move to questions for the member for Oshawa.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you to the member for Oshawa. You talked about the backlog in the courts and the delay. The government likes to say that it’s because we don’t have tough-minded judges, but in fact, it is the delay in the court system.

The most poignant—there are a number of poignant stories, but I want to share again the story of Emily, who was a young woman who was sexually assaulted in her home. She bravely took her rapist to court despite how difficult we can imagine that is, only to have her case delayed again and again, and then finally it was thrown out because it passed the 18-month timeline.

To the member from Oshawa, can you imagine the indescribable feeling of being violated not once, but twice by this system and a government who puts this bill forward and doesn’t put anything in there to make sure that something like this does not happen again in the province of Ontario?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: For women like Emily—and I say “women,” because there are a lot of women who are struggling with even finding the—I hesitate to say strength, but to have faith in the system, to even enter the system, to come forward with an accusation and step into the system. And then to have gone all the way through it and to not get the day in court, to know that her abuser or the perpetrator had gone free—I don’t know the words to

say to someone like Emily. But I do have the words to say to this government—and that is, Emily is not an anomaly.

There are a lot of folks out there who deserve justice, not only access to justice. What we can do to fix the system, we have to do.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

1640

Ms. Laura Smith: I thank the member for her statement.

I was working within the courts during COVID, before and after, and it was remarkable, actually, because they went from a system where we filed papers to get things done. The AG flicked a switch over the course of a few weeks, and they hit the gas and they modified and they modernized the courts in a way that literally was unprecedented when it comes to speed. He should actually be applauded for that because that was absolutely remarkable. I watched it happen in real time, and I have a real concept of how that was difficult for the legal community. But the courts worked throughout the pandemic.

I'm just wondering, don't you think these initiatives were positive? What would be the alternative had we not been able to modernize the way we have through this new legislation?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I think that there was so much "pivoting"—that word almost causes stress, because we all had to pivot so much—during COVID, and so much was learned. So, I'm not going to say that these advances or that these digital systems or modernizations were all bad. In fact, it allowed the systems to continue once we got to that point.

But talking about tribunals—why is that all that we can do? Why did we have 11 in-person hearings at the tribunals last year? That's it. That should be an opportunity. Technology should be an option and an opportunity. It should not be the requirement.

Even the letter that I read from Jackie—she's 70 years old, and she has no idea what to do with Zoom. Why is that her only option to access justice?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

M^{me} France Gélinas: As the member mentioned, recently our Premier has made disturbing statements about his desire to increase political influence over judicial candidates. You will all remember in the House, when we asked, he said it, and then the next day he doubled down, and on the third day he tripled down, and on the fourth day he quadrupled down that he wants to make sure that judges are people who support the Conservatives' ideas, no matter what people think.

There have been many, many people within the judicial system who say that in order for the judicial system to be as strong as possible, it has to be independent of politicians' views.

Do you see anything in that bill that will rebuild the public trust after the Premier's comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you for the question.

I think, disappointingly, the positives in this bill are going to get lost because folks right now have less faith

than they did in the direction that the Premier is going when he has doubled, tripled, quadrupled down on appointing like-minded judges. I'll continue in that vein.

The Federation of Ontario Law Associations have called on this government to depoliticize and return independence to the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee. One of the things that they have shared is that the Premier's comments contaminate all of the government's judicial appointments, and that is really problematic, because with judges who are there based on merit—now it's up to the average Ontarian to guess which ones, if the government is highlighting that they want political appointments. That undermines people's faith, and the government knows that, and yet, they're doing it anyway.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Billy Pang: As all Ontarians know, the NDP and the Liberals have a strong passion to protect offenders by defunding the police and also freeing the offenders back to the street ASAP.

This government's Enhancing Access to Justice Act, 2023, would, if passed, make it easier for more victims of crime to sue an offender for emotional distress and also increase access to justice for victims by making changes to the Victims' Bill of Rights, 1995, and its regulations, allowing victims to sue for emotional distress and related bodily harm for more crimes, including terrorism, motor vehicle theft, human trafficking etc.

So what specific policies in this proposed legislation does the member have issues with?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I love sitting beside the member from Nickel Belt, who very quickly reminded me that it was the government that closed the police detachment in Gogama.

When we're talking about those partnerships that help people stay safe or, as the member just raised, how we support victims of crime—this is a government that voted against an NDP amendment in committee that would have required the Attorney General to make a plan to increase the amount of compensation available to victims under the Victim Quick Response Program+, which was a replacement, by the way, for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, which had its own problems, but victims had access to money that they don't anymore.

Also, the amendment wanted to extend the program's deadlines, making it more accessible to victims of historical crimes and making that program available to eligible victims regardless of their access to other available publicly funded programs. And you said no.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Another question?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I thought it was ironic that the government question that just came before talked about passion with regard to crime. Ironically, it seems that the government does have passion when it comes to crime, but when it comes to helping victims, all the passion goes out of the room; there's no passion whatsoever. In fact, they got rid of the victim compensation board, and they've replaced it with something that gives far less.

When people become victims of violence, their families can be destroyed. They need help. They're counting on a government. And yet, this government has no passion to help those victims. Why?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm not sure. The government kind of pats itself on the back as being law and order, and yet, when it comes to keeping people safe in the first place or when bad things happen, ensuring that those victims have support, they don't show up. I don't have a why—I think it's the bumper sticker politics of “tough on crime.” But we're not strong when it comes to supporting victims of crime, and that's a disappointing thing to say.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to further debate.

Mr. Ross Romano: Speaker, I move that the question now be put.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): MPP Romano has moved that the question be now put. There have been more than six hours of debate, and 16 members have spoken. I'm satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion that the question be now put, please say “aye.”

All those opposed to the motion that the question be now put, please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Mr. John Vanthof: On division.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I declare the motion carried, on division.

MPP Downey has moved third reading of Bill 157, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to the courts and other justice matters.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

GET IT DONE ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 POUR PASSER À L'ACTION

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 29, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 162, An Act to enact the Protecting Against Carbon Taxes Act, 2024 and amend various Acts / Projet de loi 162, Loi édictant la Loi de 2024 sur la protection contre les taxes sur le carbone et modifiant diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate?

1650

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to speak in the House—and I hope someone can hand me a briefing note.

The working title is the Get It Done Act. A lot of parts of this bill came out in the press before we actually saw the legislation. I have to admit that the first thing that came

to my mind when I heard “Get It Done” bill—in my part of the world, it's the “get 'er done.” I thought, they've finally come to a new low: They've hired Larry the Cable Guy to write their legislation. But at least Larry is funny.

In my part of the world, when you say “get 'er done,” it doesn't really mean quality; it doesn't mean careful. It just means “just get 'er done.” You don't hire a carpenter who just gets 'er done. It's just not something that exudes confidence.

As we went farther and farther, more reports and more reports—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Amending the environmental stuff.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes. As we went farther and farther, some of the things, if you will recall, the Ford—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It's only 10 minutes now.

Mr. John Vanthof: Oh, I thought I had 20 minutes.

Laughter.

Mr. John Vanthof: I hope you enjoyed that last 10 minutes, because it flew by for me. It forced me to lose my place in my well-prepared remarks.

If you will recall, at some point the Ford government decided to remove the need for licence plate stickers for registration—get 'er done. They seem to have forgotten that you still needed to remind people to register their plates—when it came to where they realized that is when police started to pull people over because their plates weren't registered. I know the police were doing that because they pulled me over as well—get 'er done. I, like many other Ontarians—we have busy lives and just didn't realize. In true—I don't think it's Larry the Cable Guy fashion; this one is more Homer Simpson. D'oh. We need to make sure that people don't get charged because we no longer need them to register their cars. That's a big part of the “get 'er done” bill.

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: Get 'er done.

Something else that the “get 'er done” bill—I can't get the “get 'er done” out of my head. There's another analogy that I could compare this with, but I'm not sure if I can go there.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Go ahead.

Mr. John Vanthof: Okay. I've been given dispensation from the government House leader.

After I thought of Larry the Cable Guy and then Homer Simpson, what this bill really reminds me of—and my own party might not even like this analogy—the Dukes of Hazzard.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Oh, don't go there.

Mr. John Vanthof: Not the movie. I've never seen the movie. The series.

We all know who Boss Hogg is. We don't have to go any further with Boss Hogg, right? We had—and it had been a long time, so I'll think. I think the sheriff was Rosco P. Coltrane—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I think so, too.

Mr. John Vanthof: He was Boss Hogg's enabler. Then we had—oh, I've got to get this right—the deputy, Enos.

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: Oh, man.

Enos was the apologist. Deep down, he knew what the Boss and Rosco were trying to do just wasn't 100%—it was more “get 'er done” than it was “let's make this work and let's make it work for everybody.”

Really, the question for me is, who are the Roscos on the other side and who are the Enoses?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Who are the what?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I know the answer to that question.

Mr. John Vanthof: I can't help it that the guy's name was Enos. Come on.

The Get It Done Act reminds me and many other Ontarians—it seems tired.

I was recently at the annual meeting, the annual banquet, of Beef Farmers of Ontario. I'm pretty sure you can't get a much more conservative group than Beef Farmers of Ontario. We were talking about Get It Done—and I respect the people I was talking to. They were Conservatives; no doubt about it—old-style Conservatives, like, “Do things right.” They described this bill as gimmicky. Even the title, Get It Done—come on. “Get 'er done.” No.

This is the bill that takes the tolls off where there are no tolls?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes; got it.

Mr. John Vanthof: Getting it done.

This is the bill that tries to force future governments to have referendums on carbon pricing, except for the carbon-pricing regime that this government already employs. Let's make it clear: This government does have a carbon-pricing regime, but Ontarians can't vote on that one, but for any subsequent one, they can have a referendum.

There are many other things that could have had referendums. Perhaps a referendum on the greenbelt, before they—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: That would be good.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes. You could have saved yourselves.

To the government's credit, they made a mistake and they retracted. But if they had had a referendum early on—“Do you want to destroy the greenbelt?”—I think Ontarians would have said a loud no. It would have saved them a lot of grief.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: They're also expediting appropriations.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, well, I would have gotten into the in-depth of the expropriation stuff, if I hadn't lost 10 minutes somewhere.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was just like this, and it was done.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaking of Enos.

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: Okay. All right. Anyway, Speaker, I believe my time is up.

1700

Applause.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): And a well-deserved round of applause.

It's now time for questions.

Mr. Graham McGregor: Congratulations to the member on a wonderful speech.

I know the member is from northern Ontario. I am from Brampton, which is north of here but not quite north Ontario, and I heat my home with natural gas, so I pay carbon tax on that. I drive in to work—took the train today, but about half the time, I drive in to work—and pay the carbon tax on that one. When I go to the grocery store—I'm not old enough to remember what groceries used to cost, but they certainly seem to cost a lot of money—I pay the carbon tax on that.

So I guess I'm wondering—the member, I presume, heats his home and drives a car and pays for groceries, so I'm just wondering how much carbon tax does the member pay and, I guess, if we had a referendum on implementing a carbon tax, how would the member vote on that referendum? Would he vote yes or would he vote no?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you to the member from Brampton. That's actually a great question. I don't pay as much current carbon tax as you might think because I heat with wood. So I spend a lot of time chopping wood.

But if we had to—we have voted several times in this House against the federal carbon tax. We, as a party, have never supported the current federal carbon tax. We do believe there should be some kind of pricing regime to—we voted for cap-and-trade, which is actually pretty close to what your government has implemented. Yes, you don't want to talk about it. You don't want to talk about it, but we have never been in favour of the carbon tax. At least, I have never voted for the carbon tax, and I've been here for a long time.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Speaker, you know, you can't make this up. This government put out these blue plates not that many years ago. Those plates couldn't be seen in bad weather, couldn't be seen in the light of day, they couldn't be seen in the night, and it was an embarrassment, right? Because border officials, officers were saying, “Guys, get it done. Get these plates off. They're a safety issue. They're a safety issue”—over 150,000 on the road.

And so what did this government do? The minister came out and he announced a plan. Do you know what he announced the plan to get it done was? To let weathering and rust take care of the plates. The plan was to do nothing.

My question is, why can't this government get it done right?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you to the member from—Humber River—Black Creek, right?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Yes.

Mr. John Vanthof: The blue plates—oh, man. That's a case of getting 'er done. Getting it done, right? And basically no one was asking for the blue plates. It turns out that no one could see the blue plates at night.

I distinctly remember: “We're going to find a way to remove the blue plates.” And now they've found a way. They're just going to wait until they fall off, which is kind of funny, because you would think if you were designing a new plate, you would want one that would last a long, long time. You know, if you're not happy with the old ones, you're going to design something—they're kind of

more plastic. I don't know. They're much different, so I'm assuming they designed them to last a lot longer, but it doesn't seem to be the case.

So the new plan is we just wait long enough and they'll fall apart, and that seems to be kind of emblematic about how a lot of things in this government run: Just wait long enough and it will fall apart.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: You know, the Get It Done Act is probably one of the best names I can think of for everything that our government has been doing for the last several years.

I actually got into politics—and I appreciate that the member is concerned about his constituents and his community, as well as anybody in this room. But I remember knocking on doors when I wasn't a politician and wondering—and I represent Thornhill. It doesn't have a subway. It hadn't had a subway. It hadn't gone north of Finch for decades, and it was traumatic, literally, to get cars up and down the corridor. I would knock on doors, as I said, as a young mother, saying, “When are we going to get this infrastructure in? When is it going to happen?” Previous governments did not get it done but, God bless us, because you know what? I'm at Finch subway station, they're digging and they're getting things ready. We're getting it done, and that's what we do.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the member for that question. I don't have a lot of expertise in subways. Although when I go to the local Subway, teriyaki chicken is my favourite, I just gotta say.

But I do recall long before I was here that actually—and we're going to get a lot of complaints from the other side—the Rae government was building a subway and the Harris government came and filled it with concrete, capped it off. So like the greenbelt—get 'er done—wanting to pave it over and then having to back off. Challenging the Constitution—getting 'er done—and having to back away. That's emblematic of getting 'er done.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: This government fails to see the ramifications—even if it's smallest changes to legislation that affect people's lives who literally have to pay the price, they pay figuratively and literally.

I also think this government's tendency to pass hasty legislation and figure it out later is negatively impacting our communities time and time again, and I'll give an example. Tom is one of my constituents. He got pulled over and got a \$300—

Interjection.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes, imagine that. It is my constituent. It's in writing.

Tom got a ticket because his driver's licence expired—\$300, Speaker. Now, Tom honestly and genuinely didn't know his licence was expired because this government stopped sending out notices to people, but they forgot to tell people.

I'd like to ask the member, now that Tom has received a \$300 fine, what would you think this government would

say to Tom and will they take ownership for the mismanagement that they've created for people like Tom who got a \$300 fine for not having a licence?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you to my colleague for that question. If I was Tom, I'd be pretty upset because when the government made a really big deal about taking off the registration fee, it was very far down in the fine print that you still had to register. And you know what? People don't—and we all know this—look at the fine print. When I didn't get the paper anymore that I needed to redo it—now I get a notice, but now with the “get 'er done act,” I don't get the notice anymore, I guess. We're really working for the people. First, we have people like Tom paying big fines, government in control takes action—getting 'er done—so that other people won't get fines anymore for something they shouldn't have been fined for in the first place.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. John Fraser: I agree with the member from Thornhill. This government is certainly digging. They've been digging a hole for a long time, and deeper and deeper it gets.

But I want to ask you about tolls. The government says we're banning tolls. A big news release goes out all across Ontario with the news headlines saying, “We're banning tolls.” But in actual fact, they're part of a party that ensured there would be tolls on the 407 in perpetuity and that they would increase. But here's the kicker: They've got a piece of highway from Brock, not quite going up to Peterborough on the 115, that they own, so they're outlawing tolls except they're not outlawed on the piece of road that they own. Can you explain that to me?

Mr. John Vanthof: They say you never learn anything in this place, and that's not true. That's not true. Before a few weeks ago, myself and most Ontarians thought that the 407 had all been leased for 99 years in a very bad deal from Conservatives, but it turns out there's a chunk of the 407, the 407 East, that still belongs to the province. That's news to many of us, and there are tolls on that chunk of highway, but in this new bill they're removing all tolls but hoping that people don't realize that there's a chunk of highway owned by the province where they're still collecting tolls. It's like having a referendum on taxes unless they impose them. It doesn't make any sense, Speaker.

1710

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Boy, I can't resist the opportunity to debate the “get it done wrong” act. And let me tell you why it's getting it done wrong, Speaker: This act is going to make the affordability crisis worse and it's going to make the climate crisis worse.

Let's start with the way this bill is imposing expensive sprawl onto communities in this province. Speaker, it takes two and a half times more money to service sprawl and to build the infrastructure for sprawl than it does to actually get it done building homes that people can afford in the communities they know and love. So this government, first of all, imposed sprawl on municipalities. Then

they said, “No, we’re going to backtrack on that and not impose sprawl on municipalities.” Now they’re going to backtrack on the backtrack to impose sprawl on municipalities once again through enforced boundary expansions in this act.

Now, it would be so much cheaper for people, for municipalities, for government, for all of us if the government would just simply legalize housing, say yes to fourplexes and four-storey as of right across the province, so we can build homes that people can afford in the communities they love. If they would legalize building missing middle housing, six to 11 storeys, along major transit and transportation corridors, we could actually build homes that people can afford, and municipalities could actually afford to build the servicing for those homes. But instead, the government has been focusing their time, money and attention on sprawl that is there to benefit speculators and not people. So we’re going to be looking at property tax increases all across the province. We’re seeing municipalities everywhere in Ontario having to jack up property taxes to primarily line the pockets of speculators who are going to be the primary beneficiaries of the sprawl agenda.

So why is that going to make the climate crisis worse? Well, it’s going to pave over our farms, forests and wetlands—the very lands that feed us, the lands that protect us from the escalating costs of climate-fuelled extreme weather events.

So then, the government, in this “get it done wrong” act, basically did something I didn’t think the government could do: They’re actually going to even make the Environmental Assessment Act worse. Why are they going to make the Environmental Assessment Act worse? So they can speed up the construction of Highway 413, the \$10-billion boondoggle that will save people 60 seconds when we have a highway just a few kilometres south of there that’s underutilized, underused, that we could actually divert truck traffic onto, again saving taxpayers money.

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Well, no. I mean, that’s fine. If the NDP put tolls on it in the past, we’re talking about, how do we get truckers off of the 401 onto the 407 so we can save taxpayers money and we can speed up commute times right now? This could be done tomorrow. You don’t have to wait 10 years. It can be done tomorrow—far cheaper for taxpayers, better for the economy, better for the climate. It won’t pave over 2,000 acres of farmland, unleashing sprawl onto even more prime farmland, pave over 400 acres of the greenbelt and traverse 85 waterways, putting our waterways at risk.

So the government had an opportunity to avoid all these costs, all this destruction, and actually say, “We’ll get rid of tolls on the one highway there are actually tolls on,” instead of talking about some mythical highway somewhere in the future.

Speaker, where else is it going to make the climate and affordability crisis worse? Well, if the government was serious about actually having a plan to address the climate crisis and set Ontario up for success in the emerging climate economy, they could actually take over the federal carbon pricing mechanism and up the rebate, and the

Premier could write cheques to people as part of their rebate. But instead, the government wants to take our rebate away from us and disincentivize economic activity to lead to decarbonization, where \$1.8 trillion was invested last year globally. We could be attracting that investment in Ontario, reducing climate pollution, creating jobs and putting more money in people’s pockets by raising rebate cheques.

I want to conclude with this whole licence plate scheme. I was the only MPP in the House—I’ll proudly say this—who got up and made it clear that I voted against this whole licence plate scheme. It passed on a voice vote. I got up and said, “Hey, I’m the one person opposed to it.” Do you know why I’m opposed to it, Speaker? It cost us \$2 billion in the first year, \$1.5 billion each and every year. So when people talk about not having money for health care, not having money for education, not having money for housing affordability, there’s where we could find money. The government is taking it away from us.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We’re going to go to questions for the member for Guelph.

Mr. Graham McGregor: There you have it, Madam Speaker: We heard the member from Guelph say that he actually likes taxes and actually doesn’t believe that Ontarians are taxed enough. He actually wants to tax them more, so we should pay taxes on our licence plate stickers and we should pay an increased carbon tax.

I think of the song Taxman, by the Beatles. I’m not quite old enough to have been there when it came out, but if you take a walk, he’ll tax the street; if you get too cold, he’ll tax the heat. It is ridiculous. To drive, to heat your home, to buy groceries: Out-of-control, ideological governments have made everything more expensive, and now the federal government, on April 1, will actually be increasing the carbon tax—believe it or not—in this affordability crisis that we have.

If there was a referendum on increasing the carbon tax on April 1, would the member vote yes or no? Or does he think they should increase it even further than they’re already doing?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, what I don’t want is I don’t want my children to wait 16 hours in an emergency department when they need access to medical care. I don’t want my parents and grandparents to not be able to access long-term care or be able to age at home with proper home care. What I don’t want are more downtown businesses being hurt because the intersecting crisis of poverty, homelessness, mental health and addictions is leading to tent cities literally in our downtowns and across communities across the province.

The government has a role to play in making life better and more affordable for people to ensure that people have access to the care and services they need. We can do that if we say things like, “Yes, I’ll pay \$120 for my licence sticker, because I know it’s going to raise \$1.5 billion to make my community a better, more caring place.”

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to thank the member for his always-eloquent speech. I wanted to ask a question of

him: When this was first debated at second reading, a government member got up and spoke that tolls weren't the way to go; that it was actually gas tax that was the way to go, that it was sensible, that it was smart. A PC Conservative Ford government member said that the gas tax was the way to go. In fact, he sits way over on that side. I just wanted to ask what the member thought about this Conservative government member talking about gas tax being the way to go.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the question. I was a little confused by it. I'm surprised that a Conservative member would actually say to increase the gas tax, but maybe if they did, that would be an interesting argument.
1720

I'm going to say something as an electric vehicle driver: One of the things I oftentimes hear from Conservatives is, "How are we going to pay for roads when all you folks start driving EVs and we no longer collect the gas tax from you because we're in EVs?" Well, one of the ways that we can collect money to actually support the maintenance, safety, upkeep of our roads is to actually have a licence sticker fee that even electric vehicle drivers would pay for, that I would be happy to pay for, because we know that fuel taxes are going to go down as people switch to electric vehicles. We know that, so I just want to be honest with people about how we can pay for things in this province—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We'll need to move to the next question.

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, just a quick question: I heard in the last debate we were talking about tolls, and the government owns part of a road that they're charging tolls on and they don't want to take them off. Now they're worried about breaking a contract? The government that has broken so many, so many contracts and gone in reverse so much on things like MZOs and the greenbelt and the "notwithstanding" clause and green energy—I don't really understand, Speaker, why the government is concerned over breaking contracts.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member from Ottawa South's question. I think they're concerned because they have such a poor legal record. They tend to lose most of their legal cases, so I'm thinking they're probably worried they're going to lose the case.

But here's the reality: We can pay for tolls for truckers for 30 years—for 30 years—on the 407, and it won't even come in at half the cost of building Highway 413. Let's solve gridlock tomorrow by putting those truckers on the 407, saving us money.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to further debate.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Merci, madame la Présidente. Ça me fait plaisir de dire quelques mots au sujet du projet de loi 162, Loi édictant la Loi de 2024 sur la protection contre les taxes sur le carbone et modifiant diverses lois. En français, la loi s'appelle « passer à l'action », mais vous allez voir qu'elle n'est pas à la hauteur de son titre.

On commence avec l'annexe 1 :

« Annexe 1

« Loi sur les évaluations environnementales

« L'annexe modifie la Loi sur les évaluations environnementales pour prévoir que la mention d'acquisition de biens ou de droits sur des biens vaut mention de leur acquisition notamment par achat, location à bail ou expropriation. »

Vous savez, madame la Présidente, que cette première annexe pourrait très bien être utilisée lors de la construction de l'autoroute que le gouvernement veut construire. Dans un premier temps, l'autoroute 413, qui va coûter des milliards et des milliards de dollars—ça se peut très bien qu'il y ait plusieurs personnes qui ne sont pas satisfaites que ça passe au travers de leurs terrains, qui veulent aller de l'avant parce que la loi fédérale sur l'évaluation de l'environnement n'a pas été rencontrée, et on a une loi ici qui leur enlèverait le droit de faire ça.

L'annexe 2, elle, parle du Code de la route : « L'annexe apporte diverses modifications au Code de la route en ce qui concerne les certificats d'immatriculation de véhicules. Des dispositions sont ajoutées relativement aux cas où la validation d'un certificat d'immatriculation doit être refusée et aux cas où le statut, la période de validation ou la date d'expiration d'un tel certificat peuvent être modifiés. D'autres modifications prévoient que toute contravention à l'obligation de possession d'un certificat d'immatriculation valide constitue une infraction et que tout certificat d'immatriculation expiré, suspendu ou annulé n'est pas un certificat d'immatriculation valide.

« L'annexe ajoute également l'article 5.0.1 au code. Cet article prévoit que, pour chaque période de six mois ou moins pendant laquelle un permis de conduire est valide, son titulaire verse des droits de 7,50 \$. »

C'est ce gouvernement-là qui a changé comment on fait les choses. Dans le passé, on a toujours renouvelé nos permis de conduire, on a toujours renouvelé nos plaques d'immatriculation parce qu'on recevait une lettre du gouvernement qui disait que la date d'expiration de votre plaque d'immatriculation est telle date. On se rendait à ServiceOntario, on payait et on recevait une nouvelle petite étiquette pour coller sur notre licence. Il n'y a plus rien de ça qui existe, ce qui fait que la plupart des gens, incluant des gens dans ma famille—pas moi, mais des gens dans ma famille—qui se sont retrouvés avec des plaques d'immatriculation non valides et qui ont reçu une contravention de la part de la police. À la fin de la journée, ça leur a coûté plus cher de payer la contravention que ça leur aurait coûté de tout simplement renouveler leur plaque de la façon qu'on faisait ça avant—si au moins ils avaient su.

Maintenant qu'on n'a plus les petites étiquettes qui nous donnent la date—ça nous donnait le mois et l'année quand les plaques d'immatriculation n'étaient plus valides. Maintenant qu'on n'a plus ça sur nos plaques d'immatriculation, c'est très difficile de savoir, bon bien, est ce que c'est cette année, est ce que c'est l'année prochaine que je dois renouveler mes plaques? Cela a rendu des maux de tête, disons, à bien des gens.

Ce que le gouvernement est en train de faire, c'est que tu n'auras plus à faire ça. Ça va être renouvelé automatiquement, mais pour bien des personnes, elles vont être exclues de ça.

On arrive maintenant à l'annexe 3. L'annexe 3, la Loi de 2003 sur les modifications apportées aux plans officiels : « À l'heure actuelle, les articles 1 et 2 de la Loi de 2003 sur les modifications apportées aux plans officiels prévoient que certaines décisions prises en vertu du paragraphe 17(34) de la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire sont réputées de n'avoir jamais été prises et que les plans officiels de même que les modifications aux plans officiels qui faisaient l'objet de ces décisions sont réputés avoir été approuvés à compter de la date de la décision pertinente. Un certain nombre de plans officiels et de modifications sont modifiés tel qu'il est indiqué dans la loi et approuvés sur leur version modifiée. Le tableau de l'article 1 ainsi que l'article 2 sont réédités rétroactivement et comprennent diverses modifications. »

Ce qu'on est en train de dire, madame la Présidente, c'est non seulement que les changements qui ont été faits dans la loi 165—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mme Lucille Collard): Order.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Je continue, ou c'est trop fort? Ça commence à être fort un peu, hein? Merci.

Donc, ce qu'on est en train de voir avec le projet de loi 162, c'est qu'il y a des modifications qui ont été faites dans la loi 150 par rapport au plan qui vont être défaites quelques semaines plus tard avec le projet de loi 162.

Ça, je te dirais qu'on voit ça de plus en plus avec ce gouvernement-là, qui prend des décisions à la hâte—en général, c'est pour aider ceux qui donnent à leur parti—et là, ils se rendent compte que cela a soit aucun bon sens ou que les Ontariens et Ontariennes s'y opposent vraiment fortement, et là, prennent des pas par en arrière. L'article 3, c'est des pas par en arrière de ce qu'ils ont fait avec la loi 150.

On arrive à l'annexe 4. L'annexe 4, sur les cartes-photo, « modifie la Loi de 2008 sur les cartes-photo par adjonction du paragraphe 8(2). Ce paragraphe prévoit que, pour chaque période de six mois ou moins, pendant laquelle une carte-photo est valide, son titulaire doit verser des droits de 3,50 \$ » ou 7 \$ pour une année. Les changements futurs vont demander un changement de loi. Donc, ça va être écrit dans le ciment, ça va être 3,50 \$ à tous pour six mois.

L'annexe 5 parle de la protection contre les taxes sur le carbone. Ça, c'est pas mal intéressant. Donc, « de nouvelles règles sont créées concernant les programmes de tarification du carbone. De nouvelles règles sont également créées concernant le fait d'accorder à d'autres personnes ou organismes un pouvoir d'établissement d'un programme de tarification du carbone. Il ne serait pas possible d'établir un programme de tarification du carbone sous le régime d'une loi ou d'un règlement ou d'accorder à d'autre personne ou organisme un pouvoir d'établissement d'un programme de tarification du carbone avant la tenue d'un référendum qui autorise ces mesures. »

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Là, je vois que le temps file. Ça, madame la Présidente, c'est quand même pas mal intéressant, parce que quand on a eu l'occasion de discuter pendant les comités de faire des référendums, le premier commentaire qui a été fait par les

membres du gouvernement, c'est qu'un référendum, ça coûte cher, donc ça devrait seulement être utilisé dans des cas bien précis. Mais là, on a une loi qui va dire qu'à chaque fois qu'on s'occupe de la tarification du carbone, on devra faire un référendum qui va coûter aux payeurs de taxe—ça, c'est tout le monde—et au gouvernement des millions de dollars. On se demande un peu pourquoi on se met des choses comme ça sur le dos.

L'annexe 6, elle, parle de l'aménagement des voies publiques et du transport en commun, « modifiée afin d'interdire l'imposition de péages au titre de la circulation sur une voie publique si l'office de la voirie est la Couronne, sauf si le péage est autorisé par une loi. »

On sait tous, là, qu'en Ontario, c'est la 407 sur laquelle tu as du péage. Il y a une grande partie, à l'est de la 407, qui appartient au gouvernement. Donc on est en train de mettre une loi qui dit que le péage sur les autoroutes, c'est quelque chose de mauvais, que le gouvernement ne pourrait jamais faire ça, sauf que le gouvernement le fait en ce moment sur la 407 Est, et va continuer de le faire.

Donc si tu regardes les choses qui doivent être faites, les choses qui sont urgentes à faire, je te parlerais d'améliorer des soins de santé, je te parlerais d'améliorer l'accès à une place à vivre, je te parlerais de l'inflation. Il n'y a rien de ça dans ce projet de loi.

La Présidente suppléante (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Merci beaucoup à la députée.

On va passer aux questions. We have questions for the member for Nickel Belt, for those who listened carefully to her remarks.

Mr. Graham McGregor: I want to thank my colleague for her remarks. A big part of the Get It Done Act is getting it done by giving taxpayers a veto over a future carbon tax.

Now, I know the member is from northern Ontario. I don't drive quite as far, but I do drive quite a bit and I pay the carbon tax on every litre of gas that I put in my car. I heat my home with natural gas; I'm not sure how the member heats her home, but I know I pay a significant carbon tax on heating my home. And when I go to the grocery store, the prices are out of control because of this out-of-control federal Liberal carbon tax.

I guess I'm asking the member—because we know that the federal Liberal government is actually increasing the Liberal carbon tax on April 1. I guess I would ask the member: If there were a referendum on increasing the carbon tax, does the member believe that Ontarians pay too little, too much or just enough carbon tax? How would she vote on that referendum?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I do live in northern Ontario. I represent 33 small communities. In most of those communities, we have one gas station—that's it; that's all. The gas station sells the gas at what the market can bear. In my riding, people work in the mines. They all make over \$100,000 a year working in the mines, so the gas station sells gas for way more. We will go 30 kilometres to Sturgeon Falls and the price of gas will be 40 cents a litre cheaper. You will go 20 kilometres west to Espanola, and the price of gas will be 30 cents cheaper than they sell it.

In northern Ontario, they sell gas at whatever the market can bear, and if you're around a mine, where people make good money, they sell it through the roof. I can pay two bucks a litre for gas; I get to Toronto and it's \$1.34.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question? Prochaine question?

M^{me} Sandy Shaw: Merci à la députée pour votre discours. Je vais essayer de poser ma question en français.

Premièrement, le titre de ce « bill » est « passer à l'action ». C'est drôle, parce qu'on ne trouve pas que ce gouvernement passe à l'action pour ceux qui manquent de médecins, pour tous les gens partout en Ontario qui sont des sans-abri et surtout pour les gens qui attendent les services aux hôpitaux dans cette province.

Est-ce que vous pouvez dire à cette législature ce que ce gouvernement peut faire pour passer à l'action pour ceux qui en ont besoin?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Merci—très bonne question. Est-ce que le gouvernement devrait passer à l'action? Oui, absolument.

Quelles sont les priorités? Priorité numéro un, madame la Présidente, c'est la santé. Ce n'est pas normal que 800 salles d'urgence aient fermé l'année dernière. Ce n'est pas normal que 2,2 millions d'Ontariens et d'Ontariennes n'aient pas accès aux soins primaires. Ce n'est pas normal qu'on ait des services d'hôpitaux qui sont fermés dans le nord de l'Ontario, où les femmes doivent voyager pendant trois heures pour venir à bout d'accoucher de leur bébé. Ce n'est pas normal, et tout ça, c'est en dessous de ce gouvernement-là.

Est-ce qu'il devrait passer à l'action? Oui, passe à l'action. Il y a des choses faciles qu'on pourrait faire pour améliorer, mais il n'y a rien de ça dans le projet de loi 162.

Même chose—la député parle de l'habitation. On a, à Gogama, des propriétés qui sont appartenues par le gouvernement. Mettez-les en vente pour que les gens puissent les acheter. Ça fait deux ans et sept mois qu'on attend, et il ne se passe toujours absolument rien.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. John Fraser: Earlier in debate, I was talking about this omnibus bill—uh, bill—and I wanted to mention that omnibus bills usually are heavier and thicker, and, well, you can't actually grow things with this omnibus bill. But in it, what happens here is that the government is banning tolls but not banning tolls. They're freezing licence fees, but they're not returning money to people. They're saying, "Trust me on the environment, because we have such a good record," when you look at the greenbelt and the MZOs and all the favours for land speculators.

So, there's this piece about referenda stuck in the bill. Again, that's something else. It's future, farther down the road, but it's not putting any money in people's pockets. What do you think of the referendum?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you for the question. The bill is called Get It Done. Really, it does very little. To promise no more tolls when Ontario owns a part of the 407 at the east end? They could say no more tolls on that part—no, no, this will stay. This is the only place in Ontario where there are provincial tolls. Why aren't you getting it done

over there? I can tell you that the member from Oshawa sure would like this done, but it isn't.

When it comes to doing a referendum before any changes to the carbon tax, I would say, I was in committee where we put forward the idea of doing a referendum in another part of the legislation. The members of the Conservative Party stood up really quickly and said, "There's no way. A referendum costs a lot of money. It requires a lot of work, time, effort and energy. This is not a good use of taxpayers' money." I tend to agree.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Wherever I travel in Ontario, and particularly in my riding of Flamborough—Glanbrook, the number one issue raised by Ontarians, by residents, is affordability. People are struggling to make ends meet. They're struggling with increased mortgage rates. They're struggling with the increased cost of food. They're struggling to pay hydro bills. And now, as of April 1, they're going to see yet another increase in the price of fuel due to a carbon tax.

As you mentioned, you come from a northern Ontario riding—it's my hometown, actually, in Nickel Belt—and I note some people may be making \$100,000 a year, which can go a long way. But in this day and age, if you're the sole earner in a family of four, you're still struggling with a \$100,000 paycheque to make ends meet. Will you stand with our party and oppose this unnecessary carbon tax that will be imposed on Canadians—and, in particular, Ontarians—on April 1?

M^{me} France Gélinas: As I just mentioned, the gas station operators sell the gas at what the market can bear. It doesn't matter how much the tax is; they will sell the gas at what the market can bear. It's the same thing with groceries. When there is only one grocery store, the next one is two hours away, if Highway 144 is open—it closes every time there's three flakes of snow, for other reasons, winter road maintenance being one of them—they sell at what the market can bear.

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So for people like me who live in northern rural Ontario we will continue to pay way more. Why? Because we are being gouged at the pumps. Why? Because we are being gouged in the grocery store because they sell at what the market can bear. How about we regulate the price of gas, like they do in 34 other jurisdictions—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We have to move to next question.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Speaker, I've been thinking about it, and I really believe that this government truly does not want to get rid of the carbon tax, because if they did somehow, they would have nothing else to talk about, literally. You go in the halls and they're walking the corridors, "Carbon tax, carbon tax," bumping into each other, bumping into walls.

My question is simple. Do you believe they believe that if they repeat the words "carbon tax" over and over and over enough, it may actually change the scary and embarrassing fact that they're under RCMP investigation?

M^{me} France Gélinas: There are many actions of this government that nobody is proud of, and I'm sure that they are not proud of them either. So to say that they want to change the channel—yes, absolutely. They want to change the channel on lots of the decisions that they have taken in the past, whether we talk about the greenbelt, we talk about the MZOs, we talk about many of the decisions, many of the bills that this—we talk about Bill 124. They don't want to talk about this too much because of the damage it has done to our health care system, and the list goes on and on. So talking about the carbon tax is a way for them to change the channel, not to help people struggling to make ends meet.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: It's always a pleasure to be able to stand in my space on behalf of the people of Hamilton Mountain and to be able to put some input into the legislation that this government continues to put forward. This one, like many others, has a catchy title, has a lot of gimmicks, but not a lot to really, truly make a difference for the people of the province once again.

This is Bill 162, and wait for the title: Get it Done Act. Wow, have we heard that many times in the last six years. I'm pretty sure the Premier actually had—wasn't it “get it done” nameplates made up for their desks? Wasn't that a thing? “Get it done,” right? This has been the Premier's shtick—

Interjection: For the people.

Miss Monique Taylor: Oh, it was “for the people.” Get it done for the people, but the whole bill that's called Get It Done does nothing for the people. Once again, it's more smoke and mirrors. It's something for the government to put on the table so that they can crow that they're actually doing something for people, and yet we all know, because—well, I know, on this side, in the official opposition, we speak to our community, we listen to our community, we attend events and actually put effort into listening and meeting with our constituents, and they tell us a whole different story than what this government likes to put out, bill after bill.

We hear those stories continue to hit the floor of this Legislature in hopes that the government actually will get it done and actually fund appropriately our services that people desperately need to be able to function. We're seeing that in mental health and addictions. We're seeing that in homelessness. We're seeing that in our health care system. We're seeing it in our education system. We see it in social services. We see it in the children's aid society. I meet with them on a regular basis. They are completely underfunded. They have no idea how they're going to be able to function under the current system. They're working to keep families together and at home; proactive work to ensure that they're creating stability in the home and they're keeping the family unit together. Yet they can't even manage to do that because they don't have the funding that it takes. And when a family needs mental health supports, they can't get them a meeting because it's

wait-lists. In Hamilton, I believe, for a child, it's an 18-month wait for mental health services.

So what's happening? We're seeing parents actually giving their children up to the children's aid society, praying that they'll have the supports necessary to be able to help their kid. And what's the children's aid society doing? They're bunking them in hotel rooms because they don't have foster homes. They don't have kinship. They have no supports. They don't have beds or rooms for children's mental health to be able to support these kids like they need. That would be something the government could get done. That would be something that we could get behind and say, “Yes, kids are our most valuable resource. Let's get it done.”

The autism services: We're seeing that we have over 60,000 kids on a wait-list. When this government came into power six years ago, we had 24,000 kids on the wait-list. This government likes to crow that 40,000 kids are getting service—that is so not true, and if they are getting services, it's very minimal. They're barely getting speech therapy, maybe a little bit in school if they can. They're literally languishing on wait-lists.

Then, when they finally get a determination of needs meeting, which is the check box to see what level they're at and what kind of services they get, to appeal that process is almost a year again. So now you have your next determination of needs meeting every year and you're not even through your appeal process fighting the small amount of money that you received the year previous. If the government wanted to get that done, we could get behind it and get it done, but they don't want to do that.

They want to take tolls off of highways that don't have tolls, and the only toll that actually does exist on the 407, they're going to keep it there. We tried to give them solutions. We said, “Here, get it done.” No way—they don't want to hear solutions. We could have taken the trucks off the 403 and 401 and put them on the 407 and freed up some time. I bet you I would be able to drive home in less than three hours, for an hour drive, if we took some of those trucks off the road.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: That's right. It's a good solution.

Miss Monique Taylor: It's a great solution. It's a perfect, common-sense solution. They love to use the tagline “common sense,” but yet they don't want to listen to the actual solutions.

Again, I see members nodding their heads over there because they know these are good solutions. They could get it done if they had the will to actually want to help people in this province, but they don't.

They're going to charge them \$7.50 for every six-month period for their driver's licence fee—that's going to do a lot. Statutory photo card of \$3.50—okay.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It's the same.

Miss Monique Taylor: It's the same.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It goes from regulation to statute.

Miss Monique Taylor: Get it done. Get it done, guys. Make sure we're spending all this time in the Legislature fixing more of a mess.

Talk about fixing messes: Do you know how much time, Speaker, we've actually spent in the Legislature fixing messes for bringing forward bills, reversing bills—the whole thing? Listen to this: 27 wasted days here in the House and in committee debating bills and government repeals and reversals. Bill 124—you remember that—unconstitutional wage caps; Bill 28, the “notwithstanding” clause and education workers—boy, that was something that they didn't get done. They had to get it done. They had to reverse it. They had to reverse their bad decisions. Bill 35, reversing Bill 28—although no time was spent because we let that go for unanimous consent because we were trying to help them get through a mess that they created, without spending a whole bunch of time here in the Legislature because they had already wasted so many days.

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Bill 39 repealed the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve Act. Bill 112, dissolving region of Peel; 136, reversing the greenbelt charges and the repeal of the DRAP act; 150, reversing urban boundary changes—and speaking of Bill 150, in this legislation they're actually putting stuff back that they reversed in Bill 150.

Is this what we call getting it done, when we actually have true crises in this province? People are sleeping in tents in every community in our province. In every community we have people that are homeless, that are struggling with addictions, that can't make ends meet. We have people who are going to work and they live in tents because they can't afford the rent. They could have got that done. We've put several bills forward. They could have got that done, to actually make rent affordable in our province, and yet they've ignored that because they're wasting time on their own shenanigans and then having to backtrack to repeal the information.

That's a total of 72 hours in the Legislature, which is 19 days, and a total of eight days in committee—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: And counting.

Miss Monique Taylor: And counting, because they're still doing it. They haven't learned their lesson, and I doubt they will. We try to put good initiatives forward, initiatives that we've learned from people in our community, like real stakeholders that tell us actual things that are happening on the ground. We bring it here. We hope that they listen. We hope that they will get that done. But they refuse to listen because they think if it's not their idea, if it's not coming out of their little think tank, then nothing else matters. That's really unfortunate because it's the people of Ontario that suffer once again under this government's regime. Time and time again, we try to help them along, but instead they come out with gimmicky bills called Get It Done Act, and they're actually not getting anything done that the people of this province are asking for.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to go to questions.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I want to thank the member opposite for bringing her perspective to the floor of the House, and of course, talking about the issues that she perceives to be important and that are obviously of great

concern to many of us. We're seized with the concerns that she's raised, but of course, as government, we do have some unique insights that others don't have, and sitting around a cabinet table, as I did once, you do see other issues.

However, I would like to talk to the member, who has been here long-standing—and by the way, she reminded me of my old time over in the opposition, where I was very critical of the government. It's always important that we have people that take us to account. However, I just wanted to know: She does have a growing community in Hamilton, one that I think is a world-class city. I'm just wondering what she would like to see get done for her constituents in terms of infrastructure in Hamilton and how she thinks that we should go about doing that.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member opposite. I think that we need housing, and we need immediate impact right now. We need temporary housing to ensure that we have a bridge system with wraparound supports to help people, to support people, to build relationships with people, to help them out of their addictions if possible, and to save lives. We have a true crisis on our hands, and making sure that we're implementing that true social fabric in our community to help people, to save lives, to ensure that we don't have people sleeping in tents or going hungry each and every day—there are ways to do it, but we need governments to step in and truly provide that funding to give that boost and that bridge so we can have that infrastructure needed.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I want to pick up on your conversation. You're talking about the housing need that is so critical in Hamilton. It's critical in all of our ridings all across Ontario.

The government is not getting it done on housing. Let's be perfectly clear: They're not getting it done on housing—any kind of housing. In fact, this government ignored the vast majority of the recommendations of its own Housing Affordability Task Force. Instead, they wasted two years attacking farmland, attacking green land, enriching their developers and their speculators all along the proposed route of the 413.

So my question to you is, why do you think this government would rather talk about getting it done when it comes to housing and throw out numbers about housing starts that I wish were true instead of actually getting it done? Why don't they move on housing?

Miss Monique Taylor: It's an interesting question, because we really don't understand why they don't want to get it done. Instead, they want to put the onus and the blame on municipalities, who actually have no control about shovels getting in the ground. I mean, go after the developers. Ensure that they get a penalty or fine for not being able to get those shovels in the ground in a timely manner.

And what was the other piece that you were talking about? I had something. Oh, when they're doing their counts for homes, they're actually counting beds for long-

term care. Those are not the family homes that we need. Those are not the one-bedroom units, the four-bedroom units that we need. It's really unfortunate that they choose to change the numbers around to suit their own needs, instead of actually really finding ways to get those shovels in the ground and those units built as quickly as possible. They wanted to build a highway—they'll get that done—but making homes for people seems to be a not-getting-it-done act.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I just want to say quickly that I'll give her my parents' number, and we can tell my parents, who are in their nineties, that they don't live in a home—because I find that really not very nice.

But I just want to say to my colleague opposite that when we look at getting it done, we look at where we were in the 15 years before Premier Ford came to office. The manufacturing sector was done. We had the highest debts of a sub-sovereign province. We had taxes galore. What we have done is said that we will not increase any taxes. In fact, we've cut taxes, like the gas tax. I'll tell you why, Madam Speaker: because affordability at the grocery stores and wherever we go and spend our money to live is first and foremost on a person's mind.

My question is simple: Is getting it done not keeping taxes low, as we have done?

Miss Monique Taylor: I think it's really unfortunate that the member chooses to attack my thoughts on long-term-care beds. I think we should have numbers for long-term-care beds, and I think we should have numbers for houses built. They are completely different, respectfully, to both. It's not, "Oh, I like one over the other." It's not about that. We need both, and that is your job as the government: to get it done.

Did the Liberals before get it done? No, they did not get it done. They caused their own chaos and their own problems. But that doesn't mean that you get to have a free rein just because the Liberals were bad. You've been there for six years. Six years you've been there, and we're in a worse position now than we have ever been. And if you don't believe that, then you should actually spend some time in your community, or come to mine. I'm happy to walk you around.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Again, on Hamilton: You brought up the issue of affordability. This government is not getting it done on everyday affordability for the people of Ontario, and certainly not for the people of Hamilton.

We heard the member talking about price gouging when it comes to gasoline prices, and we heard about price gouging when it comes to groceries—these big corporations. This government is weak in the face of the large corporations when it comes to gouging on the very cost of our groceries. Instead of helping people afford groceries, this government is tripping over themselves to hand corporations like Loblaws inside deals, like the fact that they're allowing them to charge for MedsCheck.

You're not getting anything done when it comes to affordability, so don't say that you are.

My question to you is, how can the government say with a straight face that they're getting it done on affordability, when people can hardly afford rent—they have no rent control—and when they spent the better part of two years fighting a wage-suppression bill, Bill 124?

1800

Miss Monique Taylor: You're absolutely correct.

When you're talking about affordability, how are you suppressing people's wages? It's talking out of both sides of your mouth, and the only one who—oops, sorry. I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you.

Interjections.

Miss Monique Taylor: Oh, stop. Pick up the chin.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Irony—it's ironic. You can say that.

Miss Monique Taylor: Yes, it is. It's ironic that people are struggling in this province, and during a pandemic, when people were working harder than ever, that Bill 124 was suppressing their wages.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I apologize. It's 6 o'clock. We need to move to private members' public business.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Orders of the day?

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Valerie Quioc Lim): Ballot item number 87, private member's notice of motion number 77. Ms. Kusendova-Bashta.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The designated business not having been moved, we will now proceed to the late show.

Pursuant to standing order 36, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Guelph has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: The reason I've been asking, over and over again, questions about the housing crisis, putting forward proposals to legalize housing so we can build homes that ordinary people can afford in the communities they love is because we're facing an unprecedented housing crisis. And let's be clear: That crisis is the primary driver of the affordability crisis people are facing.

There is no city in Ontario where a minimum wage worker can afford a one-bedroom apartment. As a matter of fact, a minimum wage worker would have to earn

\$25.96 to afford average rent for a one-bedroom apartment. In Toronto, even two full-time minimum wage workers cannot afford a one-bedroom apartment without spending more than 30% of their income.

On top of that, the dream of home ownership, especially for a whole generation of young people, is falling further and further away. Housing prices have tripled over the last 10 years. Incomes haven't even begun to keep pace. You now have to work 22 years of full-time work for a typical young person to save a 20% down payment on an average-priced home. Those living in the GTA have an even tougher time, having to save for 27 years to be able to have a down payment. It will take the average Torontonian making a median income of over \$90,000 to save over 25 years to be able to afford a home.

That's why, three years ago, the Ontario Greens put forward a housing plan that some called a master class plan in delivering the solutions. One of Canada's top housing experts said the Ontario Greens have the best housing plan of any political party in the country. Why? Because we're legalizing fourplexes and four-storeys, six-to-11-storey buildings on major transit corridors. We're getting speculation out of the market, because homes are for people, not speculators. We're making proposals to build deeply affordable, non-profit, co-op, social and permanent supportive housing to address chronic homelessness. And we're putting forward proposals to protect renters.

A little over two years ago, the government's own hand-picked Housing Affordability Task Force put forward 55 recommendations. Two of those key recommendations that came from the task force are directly related to the bill I put forward, Bill 156, Homes You Can Afford in the Communities You Love Act, legalizing gentle density and missing-middle homes so we can build homes that people can afford in the communities they love without paving over our forests, our farms and our wetlands.

What has been the government's response to their own Housing Affordability Task Force? It hasn't been to build more homes. It hasn't been to implement recommendations to legalize housing. It has been to impose sprawl and open the greenbelt for development so a handful of wealthy, well-connected speculators can cash in billions while the people of Ontario still struggle to have an affordable place to call home.

That's why I asked once again, yesterday, in this House if the Premier will get it done for people—not speculators—by supporting my bill to end exclusionary zoning and legalize housing so we can build homes that people can afford in the communities they love. One analysis shows that if only 18%—imagine this—of single-family homes within core urban boundaries became fourplexes, that would build two million homes. The government's goal—the goal we all agreed on—is 1.5 million homes. We could do it just with fourplexes—I'm not suggesting

we will deal with just fourplexes, but we could do it. That would not only be more affordable for people, but also for property taxpayers and municipal governments, because that's where the infrastructure already is. We don't have to build more sewer lines, waterlines, transit and roads, because they're already there.

That's why, when the government continually refuses to answer the question—yes or no; will they legalize housing so we can build homes people can afford, close to where they work, in the communities they love? I'm hoping they'll answer it tonight.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): For the response, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Matthew Rae: It's always wonderful to spend some quality time with my colleague from Guelph. I know we spend time together in our respective ridings because we share, obviously, some service managers in that. I'm always happy to spend time with Mr. Green.

The member from Ottawa South and the member from Thornhill, earlier, were mentioning that we are digging. We are digging; we are digging foundations for new homes in Ontario, I'm proud to say.

From day one, we've been focused on building more homes for the people across this province.

What you hear from the typical opposition parties is about more obstacles being put in the way of actually getting more homes built, more shovels in the ground—just like the members who usually sit around the member from Guelph. He is surrounded by independent Liberal caucus members who did just that—especially the member from Ottawa South, when he was part of the government. They put obstacles in the way of building more homes. At committee, we heard from a former minister in the Wynne government. The mayor of Vaughan said that the housing crisis began at the cabinet table when he sat it at. So this has been ongoing, and they have put obstacles in the way.

We're seeing now that we're actually getting more homes built across Ontario. Our housing supply action plans are working. We're seeing rental-housing starts increase year over year; they are at the highest levels ever in the province of Ontario. And this is despite the high-interest-rate policies of the federal Liberal government, and the high-carbon-tax policies which are putting so many people out of the market for that new home.

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 Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): There being no further matters to debate, pursuant to standing order 36(c), I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.

This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow, Wednesday, March 6.

The House adjourned at 1808.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Anand, Deepak (PC)	Mississauga—Malton	
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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	
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Barnes, Patrice (PC)	Ajax	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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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
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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	