

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 132B

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N° 132B

1st Session
43rd Parliament
Thursday
7 March 2024

1^{re} session
43^e législature
Jeudi
7 mars 2024

Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott
Clerk: Trevor Day

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Trevor Day

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

<https://www.ola.org/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7400.

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7400.

House Publications and Language Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1180-2987

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Thursday 7 March 2024 / Jeudi 7 mars 2024

STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY AND STUDENT SUPPORTS ACT, 2024, BILL 166, MS. DUNLOP / LOI DE 2024 POUR RENFORCER LA RESPONSABILISATION ET LES MESURES DE SOUTIEN AUX ÉTUDIANTS, PROJET DE LOI 166, MME DUNLOP

| | |
|-------------------------------|------|
| Mr. Sheref Sabawy | 7695 |
| Mr. John Jordan | 7696 |
| Ms. Jessica Bell | 7696 |
| Mr. Peter Tabuns | 7696 |
| Mr. Chris Glover..... | 7697 |
| Hon. Nina Tangri | 7699 |
| Mr. Tom Rakocevic..... | 7700 |
| Hon. David Piccini | 7700 |
| Mr. Jeff Burch | 7700 |
| Ms. Natalie Pierre..... | 7700 |
| Ms. Jessica Bell | 7701 |
| Second reading agreed to..... | 7701 |

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS / AFFAIRES D'INTÉRÊT PUBLIC ÉMANANT DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

Taxation

| | |
|-----------------------------|------|
| Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto | 7701 |
| Mr. Jeff Burch..... | 7703 |
| Ms. Christine Hogarth | 7703 |
| Mr. Tom Rakocevic..... | 7704 |
| Mr. Anthony Leardi..... | 7704 |
| Mr. Sam Oosterhoff..... | 7705 |
| Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin | 7705 |
| Mr. John Vanthof..... | 7706 |
| Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto | 7706 |
| Vote deferred | 7706 |

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 7 March 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 7 mars 2024

Report continued from volume A.
1600

STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY
AND STUDENT SUPPORTS ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 POUR RENFORCER
LA RESPONSABILISATION
ET LES MESURES DE SOUTIEN
AUX ÉTUDIANTS

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

Bill 166, An Act to amend the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act / Projet de loi 166, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le ministère de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités.

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

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I'm very glad today to stand to support Bill 166. I'm glad to see that the government is taking decisive action to support the post-secondary institutions. I have first-hand experience when it comes to the post-secondary sector. I personally worked and taught at George Brown College as an IT professor—and Centennial—and I know how critical it is to give students the support they need. This is achieved by creating clear, transparent policies like those proposed in the Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act which we are discussing today.

We know that post-secondary institutions play an important role in our society, educating the future generation with the skills they will need to be successful and get into a good job. Just as an example: In my own riding of Mississauga—Erin Mills, we have the University of Toronto, the lovely Mississauga campus. They are doing wonderful work fostering community and encouraging higher education. I myself was part of the task force in Mississauga for post-secondary education about 15 years ago, when we had to work to convince students to continue education, to finish university. Times change.

We have many universities, colleges, trade schools and post-secondary institutions throughout the GTA. These institutions are vital and play an important role in preparing Ontario's workforce for the future.

Part of the government's plan to strengthen student supports is by ensuring that the colleges and universities are sustainable. That's why I was pleased to hear the Minister of Colleges and Universities' announcement last week of \$1.3 billion to stabilize the finances of colleges

and universities. This will allow our post-secondary sector to continue to educate students without raising tuition fees, and it will make our post-secondary sector stable for future generations to enjoy.

We don't accept any form of racism or hate. Hate is not acceptable on our post-secondary campuses—or anywhere else in Ontario. On university and college campuses, everyone must be able to feel safe.

If this act is passed, post-secondary institutions would be required to implement policies and rules to combat racism and hate. Then, if an incident occurred, institutions would be required to follow through on their policy and address the issue. These policies are essential to ensuring that campuses can feel safe, welcoming and inclusive for all students.

When my colleague from Waterloo was speaking, she was speaking about online education. She was kind of attacking—she doesn't like the fact that online education is fulfilling a special need in our community. As a teacher, as an instructor, as a professor, sometimes, especially with the weather in the winter semester—lots of students who are international students actually ask for the online. They would like to be able to enjoy the learning process without having to travel for two hours or an hour and a half in traffic, when it is snowing. I think the online is important.

Generally, our government is not saying one size fits all. There will always be people who prefer this or that, and we have to keep some choices for students, for educators and for institutions to be able to fulfill different sectors, different requirements of different students in different conditions.

Our government understands the importance that post-secondary institutions play in our society. A good education not only opens up more opportunities for students but promotes economic prosperity for the entire province.

In 2019, our government reduced tuition fees by 10%—first time in decades we heard about tuition reduction. It's always “tuition goes up.” Then, we froze tuition for the next four years. This freeze has allowed for substantial savings for Ontario students and their families. Even despite the freeze, Ontario undergrad tuitions are the fourth-highest in Canada with this freeze. By continuing the tuition freeze, our government is making life more affordable for Ontario students and young adults and making post-secondary education more accessible.

At the beginning of our first term, our government announced the Student Choice Initiative, which gave students more control over their fees. Times have changed since then, but our commitment to maintain affordability for students is unchanged.

The Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, if passed, would continue these efforts by providing transparency to students about their fees. The Minister of Colleges and Universities will have the right to direct post-secondary institutions to provide information to the public about the costs of attending their schools. This should include ancillary fees and other learning materials, including textbooks. There would be a deadline to ensure that this information is provided clearly and transparently.

If students are paying, in many cases, thousands of dollars for their education, they have the right to know what they are paying for. By providing transparency for these costs for ancillary fees, activities and learning materials, students will be able to make better-informed decisions and understand where the money is going.

Therefore, this bill would, if passed, improve supports for students by increasing transparency and accountability. As a college professor, my goal has always been to help my students. I'm glad to see the government is doing the same.

Students in the Ontario post-secondary system can trust that this Ontario government has got their backs. We are keeping costs low by freezing tuitions, by increasing transparency for fees and by supporting post-secondary institutions. We are ensuring that there are policies in place to handle serious issues, such as hate and violence. All that while we are ensuring sustainability by investing over billions of dollars into the sector.

In mental health, when we talk about—my other colleague was talking about mental health support; we have been including mental health support in the form of the Mental Health Worker Grant and Mental Health Services Grant, which provide institutions funding to support their mental health. The outcomes of those fundings have significant disparity between institutions. This disparity outcome didn't necessarily come from the institution's size or amount of invested money in mental health support. It often came from the ability to plan the student journey, from quickly identifying from a student perspective what supports they need and how best to connect them to services, both on campus and back home.

I thank the minister for their important initiatives, and I encourage my colleagues to fully support this bill at second reading.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions?

Mr. John Jordan: Tomorrow my twins, Amanda and Thomas, will turn 28 years old, a little different than my friend from Scarborough Centre. But I remember very clearly, 10 years earlier, when we had three kids in university. I remember the pride of their success in getting there, but I also remember the financial challenge of having three kids in university.

I'm wondering if the member can tell us what is in this bill to help parents and students address and keep the costs of university down?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for my colleague for his question. If this Bill 166 is passed, it is actually giving some authorities to the minister to enforce some transparency on institutions to publish and to be able

to be clear about the fees, the amount of fees, the breakdown of those costs; and give some capabilities to the students to arrange their priorities and know exactly where the money is going.

Of course, beside the freezing of the tuition fees, beside the 10% we discounted in the fees in the first mandate we had, this freezing was giving the students the ability to direct their money in the right directions. We can help make post-secondary education affordable to students—and families, of course.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I apologize to the opposition side. I should have begun with you for questions and answers, so I will give you two in a row.

I recognize the member for University–Rosedale.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Mississauga–Erin Mills for your presentation. In my riding, I have many students who attend the University of Toronto's St. George campus.

I have noticed that since the Conservative government cut access to OSAP, especially for lower-income students, I believe that it does impact the ability for lower-income students to get a good, quality, post-secondary education, get ahead in life and have a good career. What is your plan to ensure that lower-income students—maybe their parents didn't go to university themselves. What's your plan to ensure they get the same access to post-secondary education as other people?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Actually, I would like to maybe correct a little bit accuracy about cutting OSAP. When this government returned OSAP from a grant system to back to where it was before, as a loan, where the students when they graduate can pay back the OSAP loan—I don't think this will change anything in the aspect of making students able to go to post-secondary education. They will have to pay back—that's a different story—but it's not cutting it down to the level where the students cannot have the opportunity to go to post-secondary education. I think everyone should be able to go to post-secondary education. As a professor and as part of this government, we encourage all the students to build the skills needed for good jobs.

1610

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): There's time for one last question.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I listened to my colleague in his speech about this bill, and he noted the huge value of investing in post-secondary education, the difference it would make to this society and to the lives of those who got the education.

So I ask him, why is it that the Ontario provincial government cut funding to post-secondary education by 12% between 2012 and 2022?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I think, again, it depends on how you look into the reallocation of funding. Maybe there is some cutting in the financing of institutions. At the same time, we are allowing them different routes of funding.

We know that all the institutions, all the universities, the majority, especially in the GTA area, have internation-

al students. They have some streams of income to add up and give good education for everyone.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: You know what? It's Thursday, and we're going to be breaking next week, and we've had an incredible group of pages here the last two weeks. I was talking to some of them, and everybody is looking a little bit sad today because they've made such great friends and they're going to be leaving their friends. So can we just give the pages another round of applause for helping us out in the Legislature?

Applause.

Mr. Chris Glover: And I'm taking a little bit of liberty here, but I saw the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston talk about how his twins' birthdays are tomorrow. My daughter's birthday is on Sunday. She's going to be 29. Can I ask and beg the indulgence of the House—can you all give my daughter Ayisha a round of applause for her 29th birthday?

Applause.

Mr. Chris Glover: And people say it's boring on Thursday afternoons in here. At least we're given a little bit of liberty to talk about some other things.

I'll just also say that she's the mother of my grandson. Probably everybody in the House—

Interjections.

Mr. Chris Glover: His name is Shea, after Shea Weber. He's in Montreal and he's named after Shea Weber, the Montreal hockey player.

Anyways, I think probably half the House has seen pictures of my grandson. My role as a parent, I figured, is always to be as embarrassing as possible, and my role as a grandparent is to be as annoying as possible. So if you do walk by me, I've got pictures at the ready.

Anyways, let's talk about Bill 166 because that's what I'm supposed to be talking about here. There are two sections to this bill. One is to mandate post-secondary institutions in Ontario to develop and publish a mental health strategy, and the other one is to mandate and develop an anti-racism strategy. Both of these goals are laudable goals. Certainly, I don't think anybody could argue against having a mental health strategy or against having an anti-racism strategy.

These are things that we need in our institutions because we need to make sure that everybody in our institutions, all of our students and our staff, are well supported so that if somebody is having a mental health issue that there are supports available to them.

Also, we want to make sure that all of our students and all of our staff feel safe and welcome in our post-secondary institutions. That's not just post-secondary; that's obviously our elementary and secondary schools as well. So the goals are very laudable.

The bill mandates that every college and university have a student mental health policy that describes the programs, policies, services and supports available at the college or university in respect to student mental health. I would say, great goal, but there's no money behind it, and

if there's no money behind it, it doesn't mean a lot because implementing these kinds of strategies is not free. You need to have subject experts out there to develop a mental health policy. You need somebody to develop the policy and then you need supports for the students.

Coming out of the pandemic, I would say, this generation of young people at all different levels of education and students who go on to work after high school—we have a mental health crisis among young people. They have gone through something that no other generation has ever gone through. No other generation lost a year and a half of their education through lockdowns during the pandemic and, at really crucial points in their social development, were separated from their friends. We should be investing heavily in this generation. We should be investing more than we have in previous generations just to help them get the supports they need to catch up with what other generations have had.

At the elementary and secondary level, we're not doing it. This government is not doing it. There has been a \$1,200-a-year cut per student across the province for elementary and secondary students over the last five years—an inflationary cut. That's \$1,200 less per student in our schools than there was five years ago. There's a 12% cut in our post-secondary, and our post-secondary institutions are now at the point of bankruptcy—10 of 23 universities in the province are running deficits this year.

When the government introduces something like a mental health strategy and says that every institution is going to have to develop a strategy and publish the policies, that's a laudable goal, but if there's no programs and services for them to be publishing, the strategy could just say, "We care about your mental health; unfortunately, we don't have any funding to provide supports." That's not going to help anybody.

The other thing the bill discusses is the importance of transparency for students to understand the costs associated with attending a post-secondary institution. This is really crucial because one of the biggest factors that causes the mental health crisis in our post-secondary campuses is student debt. Ontario has the lowest level of government funding for our colleges and universities of any province in the country. We are 10th. We are 10th, and if we were to just get up to ninth position, the government would have to increase funding to our post-secondary institutions by \$3.6 billion per year—just to hit ninth position, to be second-last. We are last, and this government, in the wake of the revelation that 10 of the 23 universities are facing shortfalls, running deficits next year, has offered \$1.3 billion, a third of what the institutions need just in order to get up to ninth position, to be second-last.

When the government talks about transparency with this policy, that the institutions have to publish the policy, the government is saying to these institutions, "Do what we say, not what we do," because this government is not transparent with students, especially around the costs. The average undergraduate tuition fees for domestic students are around \$8,000 per year. That increases, depending on the program. The last time I looked, law school, medical

school at the University of Toronto was \$28,000; an MBA was \$54,000 per year. These are outrageous tuition fees, and these are contributing to the mental health crisis.

But one of the other things that's contributing to it is that this government, with its OSAP loans, is not transparent. It's not transparent to the students. One of the things that happens to students is they take out an OSAP loan—they get in, they go to college or university, apply for OSAP, and some of the money they get is a grant and some of it is a loan. They do the calculation, and they figure out, "Okay, I'm going to have to take out this much loan in order to graduate." Then the government converts the grants that they were given to loans, so there's a lack of transparency.

There are several stories. I've got a story of one student who wrote that he owed \$7,200 in grants that were converted to loans because his parents didn't file their income tax on time, and he wasn't able to get it back. He appealed, but he wasn't able to get that changed back.

Another: A single mother with a permanent disability wrote that her grants were converted to loans immediately after she withdrew because of a sick family member. So this person had her grants converted to loans, and she's a single mother with a disability.

1620

Another student wrote: My student debt for my BA was \$30,000. I now owe \$45,000 due to the several "grants being converted to loan." So this government is not transparent to the students. They're giving students what they're calling grants, and the students do the calculation: Can they afford to go to school? Which is not a calculation that anybody should have to make in a province as wealthy as Ontario if there was a commitment to equity. But it's a calculation they have to make, and then they do that calculation, they graduate or they finish their program, and they find out that the grants that they were given were actually loans and they owe tens of thousands of dollars more than they anticipated that they would owe.

Mental health at the post-secondary level is an issue that I care passionately about. When I started teaching at York University in 2007, I had a class of about 40 students. We were talking about the cost of education, and I asked the students, "How many of you are working 40 or more hours a week while you're going to school?" Out of 40 students, six put up their hands. I asked, "How many of you are working between 30 and 40 hours a week?" Eight put up their hands. And I asked them, "How many of you are not working?" Six put up their hands. Only six out of 40 students were not working while they were going to school.

I was so taken by this because—and I recognize that a lot of people are my generation in the Legislature here—when we went to school, when we went to university, when I started at the University of Toronto in 1980, tuition fees were the equivalent in today's dollars to about \$3,000. And that was for every program. That was for undergrad, for law school, medical school, dental school, whatever, MBA. Every program was about the equivalent in today's

dollars of about \$3,000. Now, students are paying so much more.

I actually did my PhD thesis on the impact of student debt and I did a survey comparison between Ontario and Quebec students because, at the time—this was five years ago—Ontario had, and still has, the lowest level of funding, the highest tuition fees and the highest student debt levels, and Quebec at the time had the lowest of all of those. One of the outcomes of that study, of that survey, was that 26% of students in Quebec scored above the cut-off for anxiety and depression, but in Ontario, it was 46%. So, 46% of students in Ontario and Quebec are being pushed into anxiety and depression in part because of student debt levels and because of the cost of education.

When the government pats themselves on the back because they're mandating a mental health strategy at all our post-secondary institutions—if this government really cared about our students' mental health, the first thing they would do would be to restore funding and actually provide a level of funding so our institutions are financially stable and so that they could reduce tuition fees and student debt levels so that students' mental health is not impacted by this debt.

One of the bills that I introduced in the last term was to convert all loans to grants and to eliminate interest on student debt. The federal NDP was actually able to push this through at the federal level, so in Canada right now, students are not paying interest on their federal student loans. They are still paying interest on their provincial student loans, and that's something that this government could do tomorrow. There's a policy suggestion and you could put it into this bill. If you really wanted to improve students' mental health, one of the first things that you should do is to eliminate interest on student loans, and that would have an immediate impact because it would reduce that incredible financial pressure on our students. And that pressure is enormous.

I was just talking with a person who used to work in the Legislature, a young person. They've got, I think, around \$30,000 in student loans and I asked him, "What is the interest rate that you're paying?" Anybody know what the interest rate is on student debt right now? It's 9.25%.

Interjection.

Mr. Chris Glover: Yes. I did a calculation and I put it into a mortgage calculator—which is not exactly accurate, but it gives an idea. That student, on a \$30,000 loan, by the time they pay it off, if they pay it off over 10 years, they're going to pay an additional \$15,000 in interest.

This is the incredible inequity that we have in the system that we've got, with these high tuition fees, high student debt levels. We actually end up charging low- and middle-income students more for their education than higher-income students whose parents are able to pay for their tuitions and the cost of their education straight up.

Now, I want to talk—I'm looking at the time—about this anti-racism. I'll commend the portion of this bill that is developing policies on anti-racism in our post-secondary institutions. That's absolutely vital. They name anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, anti-Semitism

and Islamophobia—and, certainly, all forms of racism. I would include here anti-Asian racism, and any form of racism is unacceptable in our institutions.

One of the things that concerns me about the way this bill is written is that the minister becomes the arbiter of what is racism and what is not racism. And that's really frightening, because when this government got into power, in 2018, one of the first things that the government did through regulation was to make the minister the arbiter of what is and what is not free speech on campuses. If the minister was an independent, impartial third party, like our judicial system is supposed to be, then you could possibly count on a fair hearing if you're having a conflict, because—really, when we're talking about anti-racism and free speech, we're talking about two issues. We have the right to free speech—it's embedded in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms—but we do not have unfettered free speech. There are boundaries on it, and the main boundary is hate speech. We are forbidden—it's against the law—to state things that would constitute hate speech.

And then the question becomes, who decides what is hate speech and what is free speech? My concern is that this government making themselves the arbiters of what is free speech and what is racism on campus—this government does not have a good track record of being impartial and independent. We've seen this over the last week. The Premier has said he does not want to appoint NDP or Liberal judges—he wants to appoint Conservative judges—and the Attorney General has said that he wants to appoint judges with values similar to his own. That's incredibly frightening when they are saying that they want to have judges, appoint judges, who reflect the values that they have.

We've already seen what that can do, because this government has appointed a lot of the adjudicators that oversee the tribunal hearings. There is the Ontario Land Tribunal. The Ontario Land Tribunal is where individuals or communities can go if a developer is proposing—if an area is zoned for 10 storeys and the developer wants to build 20 storeys and the municipality says, “No, that's not going to fit, that's not going to work there,” then they can go to the Ontario Land Tribunal, which is supposed to be an independent and impartial tribunal. But there was an article in the *Hamilton Spectator*. Because this government has set that tribunal with adjudicators, 97% of the decisions are in favour of developers.

When I'm talking about anti-racism on our campuses and free speech on campuses, the boundaries with this government have not been where most of us would have them. There was an incident in 2018, where the Premier was taking a picture with Faith Goldy. Faith Goldy has appeared in neo-Nazi podcasts. She's made incredibly racist statements. We said to the Premier—and it's possible. If you're a politician and you go to an event, everybody wants to take a picture with you. You don't always know who you're taking a picture with.

But we asked the Premier, “Well, look, we want you to condemn this person's neo-Nazi views and their racist views,” and it was two weeks before the Premier would

actually stand up and say, “Yes, I do not support Faith Goldy's neo-Nazi or racist views.” Why did it take two weeks?

1630

Another candidate in the 2018 election said that it should be allowed to have events on campus—he was talking about free speech and the need for free speech on campus. He said that it would be a violation of somebody's free speech if, on campus, the campus or the university or college tried to stop somebody from speaking who was denying the Holocaust.

So this government does not have a great track record of being an impartial and independent arbiter, and one of my concerns—and I'm going to state it out here today—is that there is a lot of killing in Israel-Gaza. There were the horrific attacks on October 7. There are 100 children a day being killed for the last 50 days, is it now, in Gaza.

There's 30,000 people that have been killed in Gaza and the Premier has called anybody standing up for Palestinian rights—he's called their protests “hate-fests,” and that's not appropriate. Everybody should have the right to stand up for human rights. This is about human rights. The attack on October 7 was a violation of the Israeli people's human rights. What's happening in Gaza right now is a violation of the human rights of the Palestinians.

And so, should this government and this Premier be the arbiter of what is free speech and what is racism—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): That's the time we have for debate.

Now, it is time for questions.

Hon. Nina Tangri: I apologize, I wasn't listening intently earlier, but I did hear that last part and—two-part question, I guess, for the member. Thank you for your presentation.

First: We all attend many, many events and a lot of people are kind enough to want to take pictures with us, whether we agree with their views or not. So do you vet everybody that you take a picture with prior to doing that, and if someone asks you to condemn them, do you immediately make a condemnation if you do not know that person, perhaps?

And my second question is: Members of your previous caucus and perhaps—I don't know about members today—actually stood up with profanity towards our police. Do you condone or condemn that?

Mr. Chris Glover: To the first question: You do go to events and you don't know who you're taking a picture with, but if it comes out that a picture you've been taken with is somebody who publicly has racist views or participates in neo-Nazi podcasts, then you have an obligation, when you find that out, to say, “Those are not my views. That picture—that, in no way, should be taken as condoning the views of that person. In fact, I strongly oppose those views.”

So we had to badger the Premier for two weeks before he would actually stand up and say that, and what was the delay? Why did he delay in condemning neo-Nazi views or racist views of this person that he had taken a picture with?

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to thank the member. He always brings personal experiences to the floor and it's always very interesting and we learn a lot.

We obviously all stand against hate here—all colleagues on all sides—but I do want to go back to finances for students and the barrier to education when it comes to finances, because it's something that he talked about. He had actually shared that—I believe he said that the current student interest rate on repaying loans can be about 9.25% and he gave an example where on \$30,000 tuition it's another \$15,000, I believe he said.

You know, one of the first things that this government did when they took power was to tear up all the grants, and that seriously disadvantaged low-income students and their families because money was a barrier to education. Considering rising interest costs, don't you think the government should revisit that legislation and do more to take away financial barriers to education?

Mr. Chris Glover: Absolutely. This government should do more to remove barriers to access to education, because in that study that I talked about, the comparison between Ontario and Quebec students, there was a much higher proportion of students who considered the cost a barrier to post-secondary education in this province. It's inexcusable.

I'll tell you, from a progressive perspective and from an economic perspective, we are losing access to the best and brightest, because if cost is a barrier to pursuing post-secondary education, then we do not get the best and brightest in the position where they can best contribute to our economy. It's actually a really good investment for this government to provide both stable funding and increased funding so that all of our post-secondary institutions have financial stability, but also to reduce the burden, especially the debt burden, on our students.

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

Hon. David Piccini: Speaker, I'm just going to ask the second question my colleague mentioned and give the member an opportunity to answer, and I'll be a little more specific.

Less than a month after the attacks on October 7, a former colleague of yours signed an open letter denying that sexual assault and rape occurred on October 7. Do you condemn, unequivocally, the actions of that former member? Yes or no?

Mr. Chris Glover: I'm not aware of that letter; I didn't see that letter. I think the facts are the facts. There are ways to determine what the facts are, and it should be based on the facts.

Everything that we should do in here should be based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I've made many statements, and I've stated it before. One of the lessons that came out of the Holocaust, one of the policies that came out of it, is we learned that the Jewish people had suffered 2,000 years of pogroms across Europe and Asia, and it culminated in the Holocaust. After the Holo-

caust, the United Nations created the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and that's the standard. That's the standard that everything should be measured against.

That's why, when you're looking at the attacks that have happened in Israel and Gaza, those are both violations of human rights. When we're talking about anti-racism, we should stand up against racism and we should stand up against any attacks on human rights.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my friend from Spadina—Fort York for his speech. What strikes me about this bill is there are some good things in it, but there's no funding to back it up. We often see that. We can talk in this place about improvements in any area, and this is one where certainly the bill talks about some worthwhile improvements, but then we don't see the funds to back it up, and as we know, universities and colleges are strapped for cash. We could talk about these things, but I'm wondering if my friend can comment on, is it just talk, or do we need funding to back it up so that we can actually make our campuses safer places?

Mr. Chris Glover: You know what? We do need funding. We need funding to make our campuses safer spaces, and we need funding to take care of the mental health of our students. What's happening, because this government and the previous government have been underfunding our post-secondary institutions and students face such a huge debt barrier to post-secondary education—that has a huge impact on their mental health.

Part of my study was, what drastic measures are students taking to pay for their education? Students were doing all kinds of things to pay for their education. One of the things you can see—a lot of students are going into sex work to pay for their education. That's absolutely inexcusable, that in a wealthy society like ours, in order to access an education, a student would think they have to go into sex work to pay for their education. It's inexcusable, and it has a terrible impact on their mental health.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Stop the clock, please. If I could ask members who have any sort of signage on laptops or are using any props to please refrain from doing so. Thank you.

You may start the clock. Further questions?

Ms. Natalie Pierre: I'm going to ask a question that I asked earlier today but didn't receive a response to. Students have a responsibility for their education and that means they deserve to know exactly where their hard-earned money is going. My question for the member opposite is, Bill 166 deals with matters of basic transparency around costs associated with ancillary fees, textbooks and other materials. Can the member tell us how they plan to vote on Bill 166 and if they support fee transparency in our post-secondary sector?

1640

Mr. Chris Glover: I support fee transparency, and it's absolutely essential. But I also support grant and loan transparency, because what I read out in my speech were cases of a number of students who took out what they

thought were OSAP grants—and were given as grants—but then were converted to loans after they were actually finished at the institution. That's absolutely inexcusable. You think about the mental health impact that that has. There was one student who thought they had a \$30,000 debt—the \$15,000 grant was converted to a loan, so it's actually a \$45,000 debt. That's a completely different calculus that that person had to do when they were planning their program.

This government's converting grants to loans is just wrong. It just shows that this government is not practising what they're saying they want the institutions to preach, which is transparency in the financials of post-secondary education.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Time for one final question.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Fort York–Spadina for your presentation. It was really interesting. We also have students in our riding who contacted our office after their OSAP grants were converted into loans. Many of them were really upset about how they were going to afford an education that they had already signed up for under the assumption that that's how much going they were going to pay.

Can you tell us a little bit more about your experience with students who have also contacted your office for the same reason?

Mr. Chris Glover: There are so many students we are hearing from who have had their grants converted to loans. There was one student I mentioned: \$7,200 in grants was converted to loans.

When you talk about student debt, the average student debt across Canada—I couldn't find the number for Ontario—is \$28,000. The government is now charging 9.25% interest on that. It usually takes 10 years to pay that back—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): That is unfortunately all the time for questions and answers.

Further debate? Further debate?

Ms. Dunlop has moved second reading of Bill 166, An Act to amend the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? I recognize the member for Chatham-Kent–Leamington.

Mr. Trevor Jones: For reference, please assign it to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The bill is now referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

Orders of the day?

Mr. Trevor Jones: On a point of order: Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The member for Chatham-Kent–Leamington is seeking unanimous consent to see the clock at 6. Agreed? Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

TAXATION

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the federal government should halt the alcohol escalator tax hike on Ontarians set for April 1, 2024, which will increase the price of wine, beer and spirits.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 100, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: As always, I'm proud to rise in the House on behalf of the hard-working people of Mississauga–Lakeshore to lead off the debate on my first private member's motion this term which, as I just said, calls on the federal government to cancel their 4.7% tax increase on beer, wine and spirits, which is now scheduled to come into effect automatically, with no vote in the House of Commons, on April 1.

Speaker, Canada already has some of the highest alcohol taxes in the world, and the highest in the G7. Already, tax amounts to about 50% of the price of beer, 65% of the price of wine and over 75% of the price of spirits. Just for example, Speaker, Franco Terrazzano, the federal director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, notes that a case of 24 bottles of beer, a couple of bottles of wine and a bottle of vodka would cost you about \$120, and over \$75 of that is tax.

The 4.7% federal tax increase on April 1 would be the largest one-time alcohol tax hike on Canadians in the last 40 years. It would come at the worst possible time for families already struggling with an affordability crisis, high inflation and high interest rates, and for businesses, especially in our brewing, hospitality and tourist sectors that are still struggling to recover after the COVID pandemic. Of course, it doesn't help that the federal government is planning a carbon tax hike on the same day.

In my city of Mississauga and across Ontario, the federal alcohol tax hike would punish many wineries, craft brewers, distilleries, restaurants. According to the most recent information from Restaurants Canada, a national non-profit association that represents the food service industry, 62% of our restaurants are still operating at a loss or just barely breaking even, compared to only 10% before the pandemic. Last month, the Canadian Craft Brewers Association reported that between 10% and 12% of our craft brewers have closed in the last year due to the high cost and the downturn in the hospitality sector. Just yesterday, Stats Canada reported that total alcohol sales in Canada declined by over 1% in 2022-23, or over three billion litres. Beer sales fell to 65 litres per person of legal

drinking age, which is the lowest level ever recorded since Canada began tracking alcohol sales 75 years ago, in 1949.

As Restaurants Canada president and CEO Kelly Higginson said, “Higher prices forced onto consumers will push our already struggling operators into a corner. We are already” seeing “consumers feeling the pinch and pulling back on discretionary spending. Why on earth,” she asked, “would the government want to hit us with the 4.7% tax” increase “when we are at our lowest point?”

Speaker, that’s why our government has frozen provincial alcohol taxes each year since 2018, and I want to take a moment to thank the Premier and the Minister of Finance for stopping another scheduled increase of 4.6% just last month and extending the provincial tax freeze for at least another two years, until March 1, 2026.

CJ Hélie, the president of Beer Canada, told me, “Ontario’s approach helps us come together over an occasional social drink, while Ottawa’s approach risks placing the price of a pint out of reach of many hard-working Ontarians.”

As the Premier said, our government is always looking for ways to make life easier and more affordable for Ontario families by putting more money back in their pockets. I spoke on this yesterday, on the gas tax cuts and the new One Fare program, which will save commuters an average of \$1,600 each year.

Speaker, it is also important for me to note that the province’s latest alcohol tax freeze will support our transition to a new alcohol retail market. Starting no later than January 1, 2026, Ontario consumers will be able to buy beer, wine and cider in grocery and convenience stores right across the province. The provincial tax freeze will provide certainty and stability for businesses in the alcohol, hospitality and tourism sectors. At the same time, it will give the province time to review all alcohol taxes and fees with the goal of promoting a more competitive market for both Ontario-based producers and consumers.

1650

Speaker, I’d like to take a moment now to give a few examples of what this 4.7% from the federal government would mean if it goes ahead as planned on April 1.

Firstly, the federal tax on spirits would increase by about 63 cents per litre, to almost \$14 per litre. That’s about \$10.45 for a 750-millilitre bottle. The federal tax on wine would increase by about 3.3 cents per litre, to 74 cents per litre. That’s about 56 cents for a 750-millilitre bottle. And the federal tax on beer would increase by about two cents per litre, to over 37 cents per litre. That’s about 15 to 20 cents for a case of 24.

Speaker, I understand this may not seem like much, but to brewers and restaurants that operate on a very small margin and deal with a large volume, the impact can be devastating. That was the message from the coalition of 13 brewery and beer retail unions in a letter to Minister Freeland in December. This includes the Service Employees International Union Local 2, the United Food and Commercial Workers Locals 361, 1400, and 12R24, the Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers, and several others, including Local 250-A and 288 at Unifor,

where I was a member before I was elected in 2018, in Local 707.

Speaker, I’d like to read from their letter to Minister Freeland: “We, the representatives of thousands of unionized brewery, beer retail and distribution workers, urgently call for the cancellation of the scheduled 4.7% federal beer tax increase on April 1, 2024. At a time when Canadians are grappling with the highest cost of living increase,” it is unbelievable “that the government would consider imposing an above-inflation tax hike on one of Canada’s most beloved products ... beer sales continue to lag below pre-pandemic levels,” causing anxiety among brewery workers and worries about keeping their jobs.

The federal tax increase would be a significant instability on the brewing industry, putting the jobs of thousands of unionized workers in great jeopardy. They wrote, and I couldn’t agree more, that cancelling the federal tax increase is critical to saving Canadian jobs and supporting middle-class families during these challenging times.

Speaker, Jay Goldberg, the Ontario director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, said that the Premier is “doing the right thing” and “showing leadership by freezing beer taxes.” He said that it’s good to see that Ontario’s government provides relief, and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau should do the same. In fact, Speaker, a clear majority of the House of Commons agreed. Last March, when MPs had the opportunity to vote on a non-binding opposition day motion calling on the federal government to cancel the alcohol tax increase, all Conservatives, NDP and Bloc MPs voted to support the motion, with only the Liberals voting against.

Many MPs, including the NDP member from Nunavut, were concerned about the impact on their local breweries. After all, over 90% of Canadians have brick-and-mortar craft brewers in their communities, and about 90% of the beer Canadians drink is brewed right here in Canada by over 20,000 hard-working Canadians.

Speaker, Mississauga–Lakeshore is no different. We are blessed to have two incredible craft brewers, the Old Credit Brewery Co. in Port Credit, founded by my good friend Aldo Lista, and Stonehooker brewery in Lakeview. It was founded by Ross Noel, who reached out to me with some comments. He wrote, “Now is not the time to increase taxes on Ontario’s locally owned craft brewers.”

They simply can’t afford it. Our restaurants can’t afford it, along with so many small businesses in the hospitality and tourism industry who are working so hard to recover from the pandemic. I’m sure many other members have heard from unions and small businesses in their own communities who are worried about their own jobs and their ability to stay competitive.

As the federal government hike is approaching on April 1, that’s why, Speaker, I’ve introduced motion 81 to give all members the opportunity to stand up for Ontario families and Ontario businesses and join our call for the federal government to cancel their alcohol tax increase on April 1. Together, we can send a strong message to Prime Minister Trudeau and the federal government. The federal budget is coming out on April 16, and I hope Minister Freeland

will follow the examples of our great Premier here in Ontario and the Minister of Finance to cancel this tax.

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

Mr. Jeff Burch: I want to thank my friend from Mississauga–Lakeshore for this bill which will halt the alcohol escalator tax hike on Ontarians that suffer this April—which will increase the price of wine, beer and spirits on folks. It's really bad timing, obviously, to do this. Any time that we can stand up for consumers, and especially during these times when a lot of working folks are struggling to pay bills, I think is welcome. It's not exactly buck-a-beer, but I guess, like fine wine, we've all matured since we were first elected, so this is a pretty modest bill that simply stops an upcoming tax.

Our members from Niagara, in particular, have brought a lot of PMBs forward and a lot of suggestions to the government that I hope they'll take back and consider, our previous advocacy for the craft beer, wine and cider sector. This bill, instead of specifically working to support Ontario craft alcohol products and small businesses, simply delays a federal tax increase. But it's not a bad thing; it's a start. We certainly hope that they'll take a look at the many suggestions we've brought forward.

The 6.1% basic tax that we've long advocated for removing on wine sales at winery retail sites was a policy to really help VQA and 100% Ontario wine producers sustain and grow their business, while also supporting local jobs in the industry. We think we should also be advocating for a tiered tax structure for craft beer based on the volume of beer produced, similar to British Columbia. The Ontario Craft Brewers association have been calling for this tax change in the upcoming budget, and it would help level the playing field for Ontario craft beer producers while also encouraging sustainable growth in the industry.

Furthermore, the craft cider industry still faces taxation issues based on how their product is categorized. Cider is considered a wine underneath current taxation rules because it's a product produced with fermented fruit. However, it's stored, sold and consumed similar to beer, and the craft cider association has long called for their taxation structure to resemble the craft beer industry. So, that's another suggestion that could be taken up by the government in future, and we certainly hope they will take some of these suggestions that our member from Niagara Falls and others from Niagara, as well as from across our caucus, have made.

Being from Niagara, I did want to focus on some folks who have come forward recently to talk about our wine industry. The Niagara wine industry holds an \$8-billion potential, and there was a new Deloitte Canada report commissioned by Ontario Craft Wineries, Wine Growers Ontario and the Tourism Partnership of Niagara showing that Ontario's wine industry is the key to increasing Niagara's gross domestic product by about \$8 billion in the next 25 years, so that's extremely significant—an increase of about 35% over the region's estimated baseline gross domestic product. But our industry experts say that to achieve greater success, it will take a commitment from

federal and provincial governments to remove barriers. Certainly, making sure this tax doesn't go forward is one of those barriers, but there's a need for increased collaboration. They say a focus on best practices in other wine producing areas around the world—British Columbia, as I mentioned, is doing some great things—and the reversal of plans that could hamper efforts to, as Mr. Peller in Niagara put it, “squeeze out the most from Niagara's grape and wine industries.”

1700

So, Speaker, we're glad the government has come forward with something to prevent taxation from becoming even more of a negative factor. We have a lot of investment, a lot of jobs, especially in Niagara, Prince Edward county and other places across the province that depend on alcohol sales, a lot of tourism, obviously, and so this is a great first step. I hope that the member and his government will work with us to implement some of these other things that we've long been calling for to promote the sector and to make life more affordable for folks but also promote tourism and jobs right across the province.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate? I recognize the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's lovely to see you in the Chair tonight. I'm happy to join in on this debate, motion 81, brought forward by my colleague, the neighbour to the west of me in Mississauga–Lakeshore.

Like many members of this House, my riding is home to many businesses that will be affected by a federal alcohol tax increase as of April the 1st. In fact, Etobicoke–Lakeshore is home to five breweries: Mascot, Great Lakes, Nickel Brook, Cool Beer and Silversmith. Make sure you come and frequent them all. It's also home to the Ontario Craft Brewers, the voice of craft beer in Ontario. And we're also home to countless restaurants, bars and businesses.

I'd like to share not just my point of view but some of the comments from our local business owners. For example, Great Lakes Brewery head of sales, Troy Burtch, stated that “Great Lakes Brewery, like the thousands of other independent brick-and-mortar breweries in Canada, would welcome an excise tax freeze while continuing to advocate for a modernization of the federal beer excise tax....”

Now, from Cool brewery—great people in the riding—they informed me that “Cool's mission has remain[ed] the same since 1997; brew the most affordable, easy drinking, highest quality and award-winning beer in Ontario ... day in and day out for consumers.”

After COVID, business was down to half. But by freezing the alcohol tax, it would help continue to provide savings to consumers as well as help them reinvest in their business operations and for their workers.

Again, I'll continue the quote: “We encourage all levels of government to prioritize and maintain price stability for businesses and families especially during a period of high inflation and interest rates.”

Now, Peter Romano, who is the co-founder of Nickel Brook brewery, told me, “We are drowning under the current conditions” of “levels of taxation. I personally know of several breweries that have laid off up to 20% of staff. Our sales are declining. People are struggling...! When did beer become a luxury item? Please help” us “stop the proposed federal tax increase on our products.”

Now, we as a province cancelled the scheduled provincial beer tax increase under the government every year since we’ve been elected. So why isn’t the federal government doing the same? We cannot afford this higher tax in my riding. We can’t afford higher taxes in Ontario or Canada. People are struggling.

I completely support the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore’s motion, and I am calling on my colleagues across all parties to support their local businesses in their riding.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to first commend the member. I’ve known him for some time now, from the last session, and every time I’ve ever had a conversation with him, it’s always been positive. And before I get into this motion that he’s putting, I want to actually talk very positively about what really turned my head to look at him. It happened in the last session of government. At the time, he tabled a very substantive bill. It was a bill that talked about life insurance in the province of Ontario. I have to say that we all learn something every once in a while when members get up and talk, especially within their area of expertise. It taught me that if you allow members to have free thought and to speak, they can come forward with some very, very interesting things that could make fundamental change and be on the vanguard of change.

What he proposed at the time, and I won’t get into too much detail about it, would have fundamentally changed life insurance, because I learned from him, and maybe someone can quote me if I am wrong, that 80% of life insurance policies don’t get collected at the time when it comes time to collect, and I learned that—if it’s correct—from him. I had wished to see it come back, and I never saw it come back, so I commend this member. I commend him for being substantive in what he brings forward, and I must say, returning to the legislation today, this legislation is timely. Because after a long day at Queen’s Park, in this chamber, listening to each other, you know what you need at the end of the day?

Mr. Ric Bresee: A beer.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: A beer—preferably enjoyed with one another.

I think that this is important to talk about. It definitely does mention affordability, and I hope that this member here, bringing this motion to this chamber, allows for and opens a conversation to listen more to our wine growers, to listen more to our cider growers, to listen more to our beer and craft beer industry.

I want to take the moment to read out a little bit that came from a letter from the member from Waterloo on our side, speaking and advocating for the craft brewers, and it

is as follows: “The OCB put forward four recommendations to streamline and simplify the taxation model, level the playing field for Ontario and maximize the economic potential by up to 40%.” And you know, the inputs that craft brewers are facing has been reported to be up to 30% or 40%, especially post-pandemic.

And so, this timely motion does give the opportunity to read out some of what the craft brewers are asking for:

(1) Develop a restructured and more progressive beer tax framework which does not penalize brewers for increasing production—and you know where that’s happening? It’s happening in BC, where the NDP are government there.

(2) End the triple indexing on basic beer tax increases on a go-forward basis.

(3) End the outdated 8.9% beer can tax.

(4) Level the playing field for bricks-and-mortar brewers by closing the loophole in the microbrewers tax rate.

So this motion is timely, and I think it opens a conversation to talk about and listen more to our wine industry, to our cider industry. You know, it is a product that does get created through fermentation, but it’s also stored like beer, and so there’s some room—this government should be talking to them about what they should be appropriately classified as.

Let’s stand up for our small brewers and let’s stand up for Ontario home-grown businesses. I want to thank the member for bringing this motion here. It is timely, and we must all do more to support our local businesses.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I am very pleased to speak tonight on the motion put forward by my colleague from Mississauga–Lakeshore. And you know what? I do want to take a moment to recognize all of the excellent things that the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore has done for his constituents and for the province of Ontario. I find that he’s always putting forward very practical and very intelligent things for us to consider in this House, and I want to take a moment to recognize him for all that great work and to recognize that he’s doing a great job for the people of Mississauga–Lakeshore. And now here he comes with another great idea—another great idea to put a freeze on taxation on one of the simple pleasures in life.

Since this government was formed, we’ve made very, very, very many attempts to make life more affordable in simple ways: for example, by taking the fees off of licence plate stickers and by removing tolls and keeping the tax on gas, reducing that by 10 cents a litre—simple, practical means that we have been using just to make life a little bit more affordable.

Now we have another great idea from one of our ministers, One Fare, which is going to save people \$1,600 a year. That’s a wonderful idea, and now the idea from the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore to freeze taxes on one of the simple pleasures in life.

And what are those simple pleasures? Well, one of the simple pleasures in life is to sit around your dinner table with your family at dinnertime to talk about their day and

to share an excellent glass of wine. Maybe that excellent glass of wine comes from a place like Oxley Estate Winery, which is in my riding. Oxley Estate Winery—a beautiful winery run by an excellent family and one of the only places in Ontario where you can find a genuine operating weather rock. And if you get a chance to go to Oxley Estate Winery and taste their wine and take a look at that genuine operating weather rock, I guarantee you, you will be astounded at the accuracy of that weather rock.

I also want to make mention of some other great wineries: Mastronardi winery in my riding—what a great winery. They make an excellent product that should be shared with everybody in Ontario, but there are so many taxes. The approximate taxation rate on beer is 50%; 50% of your beer is taxed. Imagine that. Imagine a glass of beer and taking a look at that and saying, “Well, 50% of that is just tax.” How about a glass of wine? Approximately 65% of a glass of wine is tax. You’re enjoying a glass of wine at dinner. Take a look at that glass of wine, 65% of that is tax; and on spirits, 75%.

1710

I want to congratulate the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore for yet another great idea, and I hope we can pass this and make it happen.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you very much, Speaker. I’m very grateful to be able to speak to this motion, a fine motion from a fine member, the MPP for Mississauga–Lakeshore.

Motion 81 calls on the federal government to halt the alcohol escalator tax that’s set to hit the people of Ontario on April 1, which is definitely not a nice April Fool’s joke for anybody—not a joking matter and not a laughing matter.

Speaker, Niagara West is home to some of the finest grapes and wines in Canada. Our region supports a broad diversity of vines and wine-making styles. We boast over 46 varieties across 13,000 acres, the largest planted area of all the viticultural areas in the country, supporting thousands of jobs across Niagara.

As the local MPP for Niagara West, I’ve had the privilege of working with many local grape growers and representatives of the industry in my riding, and it’s been a pleasure championing their cause. I think of the Speck Brothers at Henry of Pelham, one of Ontario’s oldest and most respected wineries, and they have a legacy going all the way back to 1794. I think of Sue-Ann Staff, a fifth-generation grape grower. They have vines on that property from 1898. That’s incredible.

I think of hard-working entrepreneurs Grant Westcott and Carolyn Hurst, who are now producing some of the best Chardonnay and Pinot Noir wines in the country. These are true artisans, doing something they love, producing an incredible product that is winning awards across the country and across the globe.

As noted in a recent Deloitte report on the Niagara cluster: With the right government supports and policies,

we can see this potential uncorked, creating true opportunities for so many in Niagara.

I know our government has taken up that challenge. We’ve seen announcements in December, cutting the 6.1% tax, ensuring there’s more supports to get more of our products into the LCBO and ensure we have a strong support for Ontario-made products, which is great news. It’s economic development and jobs not just for Niagara but, frankly, for so many other corners of this province as well.

And yet we’ve seen before, when we cut red tape, what happens? The federal government adds more red tape. When we cut taxes, what happens? The federal government raises taxes. So while we’re doing everything we can to protect the people and businesses of this province from increased taxation, from increased red tape, we see that the federal government, with their threatened escalator tax to come in on April 1, is continuing their proud Liberal tradition of taxing and spending, spending and taxing.

With the federal government now raising costs for this crucial sector in my community, we see that economic opportunity under threat—not from a government in the province of Ontario who is supporting them, but from a government in Ottawa who just doesn’t care. Now, just as our government has cut costs at the pump and cut costs for home heating, we’re doing our best to ensure that we’re sending a message to the federal government to get off their high horse, make sure they’re listening to the hard-working people of Ontario and stop this tax.

We’re asking the federal government to stop what they’re doing in raising taxes and citing the open letter from the workers in the brewing industry to increase and protect Ontario jobs. Stop the tax on April 1.

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

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: As the MPP for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, it’s my privilege to support my colleague and friend the member for Mississauga–Lakeshore and echo his stance on the importance of calling on the federal government to stop their 4.7% alcohol tax increase and how this will otherwise hurt Ontarians and businesses needlessly.

Depuis 2017, la décision du gouvernement fédéral d’augmenter automatiquement la taxe sur l’alcool, sans aucun débat ni vote au Parlement, nous tourmente, spécialement au moment où les résidents sont préoccupés par le coût de la vie, qui est le plus élevé depuis des décennies.

Pendant la pandémie, lorsque la plupart des bars et des restaurants ont dû fermer leurs portes et que de nombreux Canadiens se sont ramassés sans emplois, ces augmentations d’impôts fédéraux ont été maintenues. Augmenter la taxe sur l’alcool maintenant, surtout à un niveau supérieur à l’inflation, nuirait aux entreprises lorsqu’elles tenteraient de revenir à leurs niveaux pré-pandémiques.

Les opposants à cette motion pourraient penser que l’augmentation d’un tel produit n’est pas un problème, car il s’agit d’un produit qui n’est pas vu comme une nécessité. Mais, madame la Présidente, personnellement, je détesterais

voir notre pays devenir un endroit où les plaisirs les plus simples ne soient plus abordables pour les Canadiens, surtout en cette période de crise.

Le Canada a des taux de taxe sur l'alcool parmi les plus élevés au monde, se classant au premier rang du G7. Actuellement, les taxes représentent 50 % du prix que nous payons pour la bière, 65 % du prix que nous payons pour le vin et 75 % du prix que nous payons pour les spiritueux. Ça représente une quantité énorme de taxes déjà affectées à l'achat d'alcool. Pourquoi le gouvernement fédéral ressent-il le besoin d'augmenter encore davantage ces taxes?

Nous souffrons déjà de la taxe carbone depuis 2018. La taxe carbone augmente le coût de pratiquement tout ce à quoi vous pouvez penser—des prix des denrées alimentaires, des coûts de transport. Même le prix des boissons alcoolisées en est affecté. Permettre à la taxe sur l'alcool d'augmenter encore davantage les prix semble injuste et punitif pour les travailleurs canadiens.

Notre gouvernement a toujours travaillé fort et fera toujours en sorte que la vie soit abordable pour les Ontariens et les Ontariennes. Au cours des six dernières années, nous avons systématiquement annulé les augmentations programmées de la taxe sur l'alcool, ce qui a permis d'apporter un allègement d'environ 200 millions de dollars.

C'est pourquoi j'encourage tous les députés à appuyer la motion du député de Mississauga–Lakeshore demandant au gouvernement fédéral de mettre fin à l'augmentation de 4,7 % de la taxe sur l'alcool le 1^{er} avril.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for bringing this forward.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: And I do know what a weather rock is.

But the one thing that hasn't been brought up yet in this debate is the impact that taxes on the end product have for farmers who actually grow the input product for beer; for spirits, actually. So I'm sure Spirits Canada would be very in favour, and the Grain Farmers of Ontario as well—to anything that could further hurt their market. We all know that alcohol is highly taxed. Perhaps if we weren't in such an affordability crisis, it would be a different conversation.

The one thing that bothers me a bit—and I'm going to go out on a bit of a limb, okay? So it's great. I'm dealing right now with municipalities who, for years, their councils have had zero per cent tax increases, zero per cent tax increases, and now they really don't know—and also due to some of the things the province has done—how to pay their bills and how to fix the infrastructure. So we have to be careful. It's great to cut every tax but, at some point, you have to also lay out how you're actually going to pay for the infrastructure of the future. Now, that isn't the debate for today but, long-term, we have to debate that.

But in the short-term, I think this motion is supportable. I commend the member for bringing it forward.

At the end of the day, it's not an actual action by this Legislature; we need to point that out. This Legislature

isn't taking a step. It's simply asking the feds to hold off. And that is a step in itself, but it is not as strong an action as perhaps this government could take.

So I talk about grain farmers. The price of grain is going—a direct action the government could take is actually support risk management the way it should be supported. Now, that's another different conversation, but there's things that we could be talking about in this Legislature that are direct.

But this motion is fully supportable. I just want to put that on the record and commend the member for bringing it forward.

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

Back to the member for a two-minute response.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I'd like to thank my colleagues from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, Niagara West, Essex, Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, Niagara Centre, Humber River–Black Creek and Timiskaming–Cochrane for joining the debate today and for their thoughts and comments. And again, I want to thank the Premier and the Minister of Finance for their support and for taking action to freeze the provincial alcohol tax over the last six years. In total, this has put about \$200 million back into the pockets of Ontario families.

I also want to thank CJ and Karine from Beer Canada for all their assistance with this motion and for their campaign against the alcohol tax, including ads with Dave Thomas and Rick Moranis, back in character as Bob and Doug McKenzie from SCTV. I encourage everyone to visit hereforbeer.ca to learn more and consider sending a message to Minister Freeland or your local MP.

But, Speaker, none of this should be necessary. As Ontario families and businesses are struggling with the increase in the cost of living, it is clear that now is not the time to increase the federal alcohol taxes, which are already among the highest in the world. Our brewers and restaurants simply can't afford it.

So again, I want to thank all the members here today for supporting this motion. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Mr. Cuzzetto has moved private member's notice of motion number 81. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, this House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. on Monday, March 18, 2024.

The House adjourned at 1722.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Edith Dumont, OOnt
Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative: Hon. / L'hon. Ted Arnott
Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day
Deputy Clerk / Sous-Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Julia Douglas, Meghan Stenson,
Christopher Tyrell, Wai Lam (William) Wong
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Tim McGough

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|--|--|---|
| Anand, Deepak (PC) | Mississauga—Malton | |
| Andrew, Jill (NDP) | Toronto—St. Paul's | |
| Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP) | London—Fanshawe | |
| Arnott, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (PC) | Wellington—Halton Hills | Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative |
| Babikian, Aris (PC) | Scarborough—Agincourt | |
| Bailey, Robert (PC) | Sarnia—Lambton | |
| Barnes, Patrice (PC) | Ajax | Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative |
| Begum, Doly (NDP) | Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest | Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle |
| Bell, Jessica (NDP) | University—Rosedale | |
| Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC) | Pickering—Uxbridge | Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances |
| Blais, Stephen (LIB) | Orléans | |
| Bouma, Will (PC) | Brantford—Brant | |
| Bourgouin, Guy (NDP) | Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James | |
| Bowman, Stephanie (LIB) | Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest | |
| Brady, Bobbi Ann (IND) | Haldimand—Norfolk | |
| Bresee, Ric (PC) | Hastings—Lennox and Addington | |
| Burch, Jeff (NDP) | Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre | |
| Byers, Rick (PC) | Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound | |
| Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC) | Markham—Stouffville | Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement Minister of Legislative Affairs / Ministre des Affaires législatives |
| Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC) | Scarborough North / Scarborough- Nord | Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité |
| Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC) | Willowdale | Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée |
| Clancy, Aislinn (GRN) | Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre | |
| Clark, Steve (PC) | Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds— Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes | |
| Coe, Lorne (PC) | Whitby | |
| Collard, Lucille (LIB) | Ottawa—Vanier | Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative |
| Crawford, Stephen (PC) | Oakville | |
| Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC) | Mississauga—Lakeshore | |
| Dixon, Jess (PC) | Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler | |
| Dowie, Andrew (PC) | Windsor—Tecumseh | |
| Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC) | Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte | Attorney General / Procureur général |
| Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC) | Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord | Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités |
| Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC) | Nipissing | Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce |
| Fife, Catherine (NDP) | Waterloo | |

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|--|--|--|
| Flack, Hon. / L'hon. Rob (PC) | Elgin—Middlesex—London | Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associé du Logement |
| Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC) | Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord | Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario |
| | | Premier / Premier ministre |
| | | Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales |
| Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Michael D. (PC) | York South—Weston / York-Sud—Weston | Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiques et du Multiculturalisme |
| Fraser, John (LIB) | Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud | |
| French, Jennifer K. (NDP) | Oshawa | |
| Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC) | Newmarket—Aurora | |
| Gates, Wayne (NDP) | Niagara Falls | |
| Gélinas, France (NDP) | Nickel Belt | |
| Ghamari, Goldie (PC) | Carleton | |
| Glover, Chris (NDP) | Spadina—Fort York | |
| Gretzky, Lisa (NDP) | Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest | |
| Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC) | Brampton East / Brampton-Est | |
| Hardeman, Ernie (PC) | Oxford | |
| Harden, Joel (NDP) | Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre | |
| Harris, Mike (PC) | Kitchener—Conestoga | |
| Hazell, Andrea (LIB) | Scarborough—Guildwood | |
| Hogarth, Christine (PC) | Etobicoke—Lakeshore | |
| Holland, Kevin (PC) | Thunder Bay—Atikokan | |
| Hsu, Ted (LIB) | Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles | |
| Jama, Sarah (IND) | Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre | |
| Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC) | Dufferin—Caledon | Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé |
| | | Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre |
| Jones, Trevor (PC) | Chatham-Kent—Leamington | Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement |
| Jordan, John (PC) | Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston | |
| Kanapathi, Logan (PC) | Markham—Thornhill | |
| Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP) | Parkdale—High Park | First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative |
| Ke, Vincent (IND) | Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord | |
| Kernaghan, Terence (NDP) | London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord | Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle |
| Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC) | York Centre / York-Centre | Solicitor General / Solliciteur général |
| Khanjin, Hon. / L'hon. Andrea (PC) | Barrie—Innisfil | Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs |
| | | Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement |
| Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia (PC) | Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre | |
| Leardi, Anthony (PC) | Essex | |
| Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC) | King—Vaughan | Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation |
| Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC) | Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek | Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport |
| MacLeod, Lisa (PC) | Nepean | |
| Mamakwa, Sol (NDP) | Kiiwetinoong | Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle |
| Mantha, Michael (IND) | Algoma—Manitoulin | |
| Martin, Robin (PC) | Eglinton—Lawrence | |
| McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC) | Durham | Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises |
| McCrimmon, Karen (LIB) | Kanata—Carleton | |
| McGregor, Graham (PC) | Brampton North / Brampton-Nord | |
| McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB) | Beaches—East York | |
| Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC) | York—Simcoe | President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor |
| | | Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones |
| Oosterhoff, Sam (PC) | Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest | |
| Pang, Billy (PC) | Markham—Unionville | |

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|--|---|---|
| Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC) | Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill | Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires |
| Pasma, Chandra (NDP) | Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean | |
| Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC) | Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud | Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences |
| Pierre, Natalie (PC) | Burlington | |
| Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC) | Timmins | Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines |
| Quinn, Nolan (PC) | Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry | |
| Rae, Matthew (PC) | Perth—Wellington | |
| Rakocevic, Tom (NDP) | Humber River—Black Creek | |
| Rasheed, Kaleed (IND) | Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville | |
| Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC) | Kenora—Rainy River | Minister of Northern Development / Ministre du Développement du Nord Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones |
| Riddell, Brian (PC) | Cambridge | |
| Romano, Ross (PC) | Sault Ste. Marie | |
| Sabawy, Sheref (PC) | Mississauga—Erin Mills | |
| Sandhu, Amarjot (PC) | Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest | |
| Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC) | Brampton South / Brampton-Sud | Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports |
| Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC) | Glengarry—Prescott—Russell | |
| Sattler, Peggy (NDP) | London West / London-Ouest | |
| Saunderson, Brian (PC) | Simcoe—Grey | |
| Schreiner, Mike (GRN) | Guelph | |
| Scott, Laurie (PC) | Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock | |
| Shamji, Adil (LIB) | Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est | |
| Shaw, Sandy (NDP) | Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas | |
| Skelly, Donna (PC) | Flamborough—Glanbrook | Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative |
| Smith, Dave (PC) | Peterborough—Kawartha | |
| Smith, David (PC) | Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre | |
| Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC) | Parry Sound—Muskoka | Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts |
| Smith, Laura (PC) | Thornhill | |
| Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC) | Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte | Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie |
| Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP) | St. Catharines | |
| Stiles, Marit (NDP) | Davenport | Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario |
| Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC) | Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre | Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure |
| Tabuns, Peter (NDP) | Toronto—Danforth | |
| Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC) | Mississauga—Streetsville | Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée déléguée aux Petites Entreprises |
| Taylor, Monique (NDP) | Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain | |
| Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon Vijay (PC) | Scarborough—Rouge Park | Associate Minister of Transportation / Ministre associé des Transports |
| Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC) | Huron—Bruce | Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales |
| Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC) | Vaughan—Woodbridge | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances |
| Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC) | Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington | |
| Vanthof, John (NDP) | Timiskaming—Cochrane | Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle |

| Member and Party / Député(e) et parti | Constituency / Circonscription | Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités |
|--|--|--|
| Vaugcois, 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 | |