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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 28 November 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 28 novembre 2024

Report continued from volume A.

1640

WORKING FOR WORKERS SIX
ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À ŒUVRER
POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS, SIX

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

Bill 229, An Act to enact the Skilled Trades Week Act, 2024 and to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Projet de loi 229, Loi édictant la Loi de 2024 sur la Semaine des métiers spécialisés et modifiant diverses lois relatives à l'emploi et au travail ainsi qu'à d'autres questions.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: God's country.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes):—Peterborough—Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thanks, Speaker. I'm sharing my time with the member from Scarborough Centre. This is a great opportunity for us because I get to quote something from 1989 when I start this off, because those of you who are my age or older will remember the Kids in the Hall. Speaker, forgive me for this, but this will be the first opportunity that Dave Smith is sharing his time with Dave Smith. So, Kids in the Hall:

These are the Daves I know, I know
These are the Daves I know....

With this bill, there is a number of things that it touches on. I want to start off first with thanking the staff at the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development and telling them thank you for writing out this speech for me that I'm not going to use at all—but thank you for taking the time to do that for us.

There has been some conversation about some of the stuff with WSIB and the fact that there is going to be some money going back to employers from it. There has been a narrative that, I think, is not a correct narrative that has been put forward, and that has been that we're doing something that we shouldn't be doing because there are so many WSIB claims that are getting turned down and it's just—WSIB is all about saying no, and they're just not doing things for workers.

The reality is 96% of WSIB claims are actually approved—96%. I think that when you look at some of the things that the government has done, we've changed a lot of the processes. Previously, when you looked at applying for WSIB, there was a paper process that was done; it would take time to go through that paperwork. You would have to be entering it into a computer again, and you would be doing some evaluations on that—that's all done electronically now, so it has sped up the system significantly for it. That is why we find ourselves in a position where we're able to go back to those employers and say, "We asked you for too much, and here is some of that money back."

What does that do? Well, I'm going to touch on one employer in particular in my riding. He's a great guy; Matt is his name. He employs—has employed—multiple people; at one point, he had 12 staff working for him. Matt is somebody who truly thinks about his customers. He has said to me a number of times, "How do I go to that senior widow and charge them 150 bucks because I've come over and it has taken me two minutes to fix their problem?"

He has to charge that because the van is an \$80,000 van now, instead of a \$25,000 van when he first started. The cost of his tools is as high as it is now, and the cost of labour, the cost of gas, the cost of insurance—he pointed out the cost of WSIB for him as a small business. These are the kinds of things that, when you take a step back and you look at it and you think, "You know what? You're right, Matt. It is difficult to go to that senior widow, who's living on a fixed income." He, as a business owner, has to charge enough that he can stay in business, but it's really difficult to go to that person, who is on a fixed income, who doesn't really know what the problem is and they're relying on that professional to do it.

These are the types of things that we can do then to make it more affordable for that small business owner to make sure that he's more affordable for that consumer, that person who's living on that fixed income. These kinds of things, although they're small at first, they start to add up. The more we do that, the more we make it easier then for everybody in Ontario.

Now, Speaker, I also want to talk a little bit about some of the immigration side of it. We've talked about this a number of times. In Ontario right now, we have roughly 300,000 skilled trade positions that are vacant at the moment; there is a demand for it. One of the things that the immigration system has done—we have the Ontario immigration nominee program; we get about 7% of immigrants through that program who are coming in to do stuff in skilled trades. The reality is the federal govern-

ment has made so many mistakes on the immigration system, they created such a problem for us on it, and it's not working well. It's creating a lot of other challenges.

What we're trying to do with this bill, then, is trying to fix some of those problems. One of the problems that we have with it is there are predatory behaviours out there. Every time you set up a system that is designed to do something good, someone is going to try and game the system in a way that is not appropriate.

We're seeing that with some of the immigration consultants. The reason that they're able to do that is because the system has been set up so complicated that for most people to come into Canada, to come into Ontario to take advantage of this and live the life that they're looking for in Ontario, they have to go through a consultant.

There are a number of consultants out there. They're not all bad actors; don't get me wrong. They're not all bad actors, but there are some bad actors out there who are giving us a bad name because what they're doing is they're charging exorbitant fees, they're effectively falsifying documents, and they're not providing the service, then, for those individuals who are trying to better their life when they're coming here. They're coming here to fill that labour gap that we have, and they're not able to do it because we have some bad actors who are taking advantage of them.

They're taking those families' life savings. Think about that for a moment, Speaker. We have a caucus that is very diverse. We have a number of first-generation Canadians and immigrants who are part of the entire government here.

Imagine you're living in another country, you see what's going on in Canada and you think, "I can provide a better life for my family if I move there." You do everything you can do to find a way to get to Ontario to live that dream, to provide for a better life for your family, to provide more opportunities for your kids and your grandkids, and someone, an unscrupulous individual, takes you for your entire life savings. Now what are you thinking about Ontario? What are you thinking about Canada? What are you thinking about the future? And what is that doing to you?

We need to have that skilled labour force come into Ontario. We know right now we have a shortage of skilled tradespeople, and we also know that there are a lot of countries that have some very, very skilled people, some really good people who can help us. There might be some minor differences on some of the building code things, but that is all stuff that you can learn. So we should be welcoming them.

I've had a number of constituents who have reached out to my office asking for help with that program. In particular, I have a company that I'm not going to name. I claim the company as being part of my riding, although they're actually in Minister Piccini's riding. But I claim them as mine because they're only 15 minutes away from my office and they're an hour and a half away from his office, so it's not really his. It's mine. I get to claim them that way.

They have a shortage of sheet metal workers. When you think about it, when you look at a student who's in elementary school, who comes in to high school, they're not aspiring to those types of jobs. I would hazard to bet that if you went in to any high school right now, chose any random student and said, "Would you like to be a sheet metal worker?", they're not even going to know what you're talking about. Yet these are things that we need. These are the types of people that we need.

We've got a great organization in Peterborough, the New Canadians Centre. It was run by Hajni Hos first. It's now Andy Cragg who is doing it. They're doing fantastic work to help a lot of those new Canadians find ways to get into the skilled trades.

One of the things that this bill has proposed that's really going to help is that reduction of the \$150 for the examination fee. When you think about that, for somebody who wants to go into a skilled trade, \$150 doesn't sound like an awful lot of money in the grand scheme of things, but that can be a barrier for someone, and we're breaking down that barrier.

Another one I want to quickly touch on before I pass my time on to the other Dave Smith is women-led companies. I have two construction companies right now in my riding that I've been working with, one owned by a fantastic woman named Tania-Joy and the other one by a great woman named Ashley. They've talked to me about some of the challenges that they faced, and as a 54-year-old male, I would never have thought of some of those things. We're not doing enough. We hadn't been doing enough to make it enticing for women to get into the skilled trades, and we're making changes so that they can be successful with it.

1650

With that, I am going to turn things over to my colleague from Scarborough Centre.

Mr. David Smith: I rise today in strong support of the Working for Workers Six Act, a bill that underscores our government's unwavering commitment to Ontario's skilled trades workforce.

First, I want to extend my gratitude to the honourable Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, David Piccini, and PA Barnes for championing this legislation and for their dedication to advancing opportunities in the skilled trades. I also want to commend the staff and administrative teams working tirelessly to bring this initiative to life.

A cornerstone of this bill, if passed, is the formal establishment of Skilled Trades Week, which will take place annually during the first week of November in each year. This week will recognize and celebrate the vital contributions of the men and women in skilled trades, who are the backbone of Ontario's economy.

Madam Speaker, skilled tradespeople are the unsung heroes of our province. They are the hands that build our homes, the minds that power our industries and the innovators who keep Ontario competitive.

Despite their monumental contributions, the skilled trades have long been undervalued. This bill seeks to

change that narrative and place skilled trades in the spotlight they deserve.

Skilled Trades Week is more than a celebration; it's a declaration. It declares that Ontario values its skilled trades workforce, past, present and future. It is a rallying call to inspire young Ontarians to pursue these careers and to break down barriers that have kept too many people—especially women, youth, Indigenous peoples and newcomers—from entering these fields.

Madam Speaker, the importance of skilled trades to our economy cannot be overstated. With over 140 recognized skilled trades in Ontario, we need a robust workforce to meet the growing demand in industries such as construction, manufacturing, mining, energy etc. Over the next decade, Ontario will need tens of thousands of skilled trades workers to replace those retiring and to support our ambitious plans for growth.

By legislating Skilled Trades Week, we are creating opportunities for students, career changers and newcomers to explore these fields. Events, open houses at work sites and interactive workshops will expose more Ontarians to the lucrative and rewarding careers available in skilled trades. These careers offer not just competitive wages, but also excellent pension plans, benefits and opportunities for growth.

Madam Speaker, this legislation is about more than just recognition; it's about action. The Working for Workers Six Act complements our government's broader initiatives, such as waiving the certificate of qualification exam fee, introducing alternative pathways for apprenticeships and investing over \$2 billion in the Skills Development Fund to expand training facilities and create more pathways to success. These efforts ensure that every Ontarian has the tools and resources to pursue a career in skilled trades, regardless of financial or academic barriers.

To our skilled trades workers—to the welders, electricians, construction workers, plumbers and every tradesperson—you are the heart of Ontario. This legislation is a recognition of your skills, dedication and contribution to our collective success. With this bill, we aim to invest in your future, remove barriers to your success and celebrate your achievements.

Let us send a strong and united message that Ontario is the best place to live, work and raise a family because of the skilled trades workforce that forms the foundation of our province. I urge all members of this House to support this critical legislation and stand with skilled trades workers who build Ontario's future every day.

Madam Speaker, it's very important that we understand that we have an aging population in the skilled trades, and there's no better time than now to start opening doors to construction sites, manufacturing and the technological field. Mining is another area. We have people at the age of 55 and, as a result of that, this is a time for us to start looking at how they engage with education in schools to people who have second-chance intentions of changing their career paths and even newcomers coming in that make up, I heard, 7% and even higher in some areas—to get those people going.

I believe the opportunity of having something like Skilled Trades Week opens the doors for many companies. We have to be ahead of the cart, not behind, because if we fail to prepare our men and women of tomorrow, we will not be able to meet the targets this government is working with.

I strongly ask all members of this House to give their support in the best manner they can to support a bill like this. We strongly believe that Skilled Trades Week is an entry point to opening doors to many, and I strongly support all the opportunities for this to be there in the future. So I support this bill wholeheartedly and ask for the support of all members of the House.

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

MPP Jill Andrew: Speaker, 111 years ago, Chief Justice William Meredith created the system of WSIB, and it was supposed to be there to help injured workers, not employers. In fact, one of the Meredith principles was literally for the WSIB to run as an independent public agency. However, we've seen that government after government has forced WSIB, quite frankly, to turn away injured workers, and then we see government rewarding WSIB by giving a surplus to employers instead of injured workers.

I guess I'm wondering if the government could explain to the public what the relationship is between the WSIB and its workers, frankly—many of whom are being forced or encouraged to deny injured workers like Jana, my community member, coverage. What is the relationship and is there a power imbalance at play between the government and the “independent”—which I wonder if it is—WSIB?

Mr. Dave Smith: I would say to the member from St. Paul's that if you'd listened to my speech, I started off with how 96% of all WSIB claims are actually approved. So for her to come out and say that there's all of this massive amount that's not being done is completely false—

Interjection.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Speaker.

On top of that, it is an employer-paid premium. The employer is paying into the system to support workers when they're injured. When we find ourselves in a surplus of it, it's the employer that has paid into that, so that money should be returned back to the employer because the system is working. What we're trying to do is make sure that the employers remain competitive so that the small business owners like Matt can continue having the business that he has and employ the number of people that he does.

1700

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

Mrs. Daisy Wai: This question is for the member from Scarborough Centre. I really liked what you have expressed, that the skilled trades workers are really the unsung heroes. And I like what you have in your Skilled Trades Week.

Can you tell us how you're going to continue promoting it or what you're going to do promote it so that more people can buy into and know that they are the unsung heroes, and more will be in the skilled trades?

Mr. David Smith: Thank you to the member for Richmond Hill.

Our government is honouring workers by celebrating—contributing to the golden generation of skilled trades—tradespeople who built our province into what it is today and who are passing on their wisdom and expertise to the next generation of workers to shape Ontario's future by creating a new Skilled Trades Week during the first week of November celebrating the contributions of skilled trades workers past, present and future, acknowledging their vital role in building a sustainable Ontario economy.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Certainly, I'm very pleased to ask the member a question, one that is very dear to my heart, and that is the category of skilled trades. I certainly do support having a week to identify the importance of this sector, especially as a child who actually had family members who worked extensively in the skilled trades. But I also know that those skilled trades workers are looking for certain employee-worker benefits that are not contained in the bill, and specifically benefits that have been voted against by this government: 10 days of paid sick leave, anti-scab legislation, properly classifying app-based workers as employees, equal pay legislation and the enforcement of workplace law violations. Do you not believe that it would be beneficial to those skilled trades, that you purport to champion, to make sure that that is actually in the legislation, which currently it's not?

Mr. Dave Smith: What we'll notice is that this is the Working for Workers Six Act. We were first elected in 2018; we're about six and a half years into our mandate. This is the sixth time we've put legislation forward that makes things better for workers, and you can be assured, Madam Speaker, that we're going to have more legislation looking at how we can improve the lives for those who work. So when the member opposite asks about questions that are not in the bill—I can assure you, Madam Speaker, that as we go through this process, we're continually improving the situation for people who are working in Ontario.

I look forward to the next Working for Workers, Working for Workers 7, and how much better we're going to make the workplace for those who want to improve the situation here in Ontario.

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

Mr. Rick Byers: I very much appreciate the contributions by both members. Thankfully I am not allowed to use names, because otherwise that could get confusing.

But I want to ask the member for Peterborough-Kawartha, if I could—and he's reflected on the many bills that the government has put forward. I mentioned several times I'm so impressed with the many policy elements that are in this legislation, whether it's firefighters, support for

families, Skilled Trades Week, Ontario immigration nomination program, support for women. But I wonder if the member could reflect on his own area of Peterborough-Kawartha and some of the labour issues that he's encountered and how particularly this legislation may benefit those matters that he's faced directly.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you very much for the question. I'm going to go back to two people that I spoke about in my speech, and that's Tania-Joy and Ashley. Both of them own construction companies. They have been pioneers in it.

One of the things that they have brought forward to me on it is the inequity that we see right now in skilled trades for women. Something as simple as the washroom: When you're the only woman on a job site and you're working with 40, 50, perhaps even 100 men, and there isn't a washroom specifically for you, something as simple as that can make a really big difference for them.

Carpooling was one that they brought to me, and I had never considered this entire concept. When you're the only woman working at a construction site, you're not able to carpool with the guys, because the guys are having conversations that you, as a woman, are not comfortable with. What we're trying to do is break down all of those barriers so that doesn't happen, so that we can have more women go into the skilled trades and be as successful as Tania-Joy and Ashley have been.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I want to thank the member from Peterborough-Kawartha for his speech this afternoon. I'd just like to ask—I know you've said that we have asked about issues that are not covered by this bill, but an issue that my colleagues have raised repeatedly is the theft of workers' wages. You don't have a section here addressing that. When will you actually be taking on the whole question of workers being robbed by deadbeat employers?

Mr. Dave Smith: As I fall backwards leaning against my chair, I would like to point out to the member from Toronto-Danforth that I am the parliamentary assistant to the Ministry of Finance, I am not in the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. I cannot speak to what the ministry is going to be developing as the next series of bills, but I am looking forward to what they are going to be doing, because I know that the minister himself is very focused on what we can do to improve the situation for all workers across Ontario. What can we do to promote it so that people recognize that being in the skilled trades makes a massive difference? It's not simply a job, it's a career for your entire life.

When you look at some of the people who are working in that industry right now, and what they're able to contribute to Ontario, they're the ones who are building the hospitals, they're the ones who are building the schools, the roads, all of the things, all of the infrastructure that we need. We talk about health care. We would not have health care if it wasn't for our skilled trades workers who are building the facilities that those health care

workers are in that are making the positive difference for the people of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): We'll move to further debate.

Ms. Jessica Bell: My daughter was missing for a few minutes. I was doing some frantic texts, but she is okay. The joy of having a grade 7 who goes home by herself, and then decides to hang out with a friend and not tell people. So I'm just giving myself a few minutes to compose myself.

I'm pleased to be here today to speak on the Working for Workers bill number 6. It is a significant bill, and I am going to be going through some of the schedules to discuss how it affects my riding of University–Rosedale and Ontario's workers.

I want to start off a little bit with the first schedule that I see that is relevant, which is the move to change the Employment Standards Act to allow for protected unpaid sick leave. So, workers who do need to leave for an illness of some kind have a guaranteed right to return to their job.

And then also there is, in schedule 1, a move to provide up to 16 weeks of unpaid leave for parents who have a child through adoption or surrogacy—certainly supportable.

When I was reading this, what came to mind also was the need to expand the number of paid sick days that employees have in Ontario. So, in cases of not long-term leave but short-term leave they know that they can continue to pay their bills because they are receiving income while they are sick, in almost every single case, through no fault of their own. If you get COVID, you get COVID. If you have serious health conditions, you have serious health conditions. Your job shouldn't be put on the line as a result of that.

Also, when I was reading schedule 1 and I thought about this move to help parents, it made me think about all the other measures that this government can do to help parents, not just when children or babies are very young, but also when babies are a little older or when they're going into school. It is important for this government to get serious about fixing the child care issues that we have in Ontario today. When I go door to door, I regularly meet parents who tell me that they are staying at home—it's almost always the mum—or they are paying astronomical amounts, upwards of \$15,000 a year, for a child care spot that is not subsidized, is not part of the affordable child care program. They ask me, "What can be done to fix this issue? Why isn't the government addressing it?" They're very good questions. What I say to them, and what I'm saying to you, is that there is a very real need to increase the number of affordable child care spots available so more parents have the option of finding affordable child care near their home.

1710

The Toronto District School Board and Toronto Catholic District School Board put a proposal in front of this government and said, "We want you to fund the capital costs to provide additional child care in schools in Toronto so more people have the option of dropping their kid off in the morning." They get daycare in the morning, they go

to school and then get daycare in the afternoon. So it is seamless; it allows parents to work. This government rejected that application, which is a concern.

When we're talking about helping new parents, affordable child care is key. When we're talking about equity and ensuring that women can fully participate in the workplace, affordable child care is key. I don't see that here.

When we're talking about parents, we're also talking about kids. There's a very real need to fix schools. At my local school, I frequently have parents come up to me. Just recently, one of them said, "You know, in some situations now, children grade 3 or 4 no longer have a lunchroom supervisor supervising them. They just turn on the TV because there are not enough staff in the school to monitor them during the lunchtime period. What happens if a kid chokes? What happens if a fight starts? What if someone hurts themselves? There's no qualified educator or competent adult there who is able to deal with those situations promptly and quickly. That's just one example.

Every school I go to I see announcements that vice-principals are leaving, that there are not enough ECEs, that there are classrooms that have 34 or 35 kids, especially in the French immersion classes, where it's very difficult to keep and retain French teachers. It is a real concern.

I hear stories from parents—and teachers tell me, "You know, we have some kids with behavioural issues in the classroom." They need, in some cases, one-on-one support just so that they can manage their behaviour and stay calm. And when they don't get it, the learning for the entire class is disrupted.

So when we're talking about helping workers, it is important that we help parents not just in the beginning, but we help them throughout a child's entire young years, daycare and school. That was my thoughts for schedule 1.

Schedule 2 focuses on expanding the rules to ensure that vehicles reduce their speed and move to another lane when they pass emergency workers or vehicles that are at construction sites. There are some improvements there. It is a little stricter—good; certainly supportable.

We have met with the Ontario Good Roads Association, we've met with Scott Butler, we've met with numerous delegations, and they've consistently told us that it is essential that construction workers, road workers, are not in a situation where they are vulnerable, where they are not hit by a car or a truck because they are doing their job. It is late at night, there is rain, people are speeding by. It makes a lot of sense to tighten those rules so that those workers are safe.

There is a whole lot more this government can do to ensure that our roads are safe for everyone: workers, cyclists, pedestrians, other drivers. I would like to see this government, maybe not in this legislative session, because hey, who knows? Maybe we're ending sooner than we think; you tell us. But in the next legislative session, I would really like to see some legislation that tackles the issue of road safety in Ontario.

I'll give you some examples that the Ontario Good Roads Association is calling for. The Ontario Good Roads

Association is calling for a vulnerable road users law. So if a driver injures or kills a pedestrian, a road worker, a cyclist, while they're breaking the law, then they face tougher penalties. This is not a situation where someone is following all the rules of the road and hits someone. This doesn't apply. When there are situations when a driver is texting, drunk, high, speeding, not following the road rules and making a left- or a right-hand turn illegally, running a red. In those situations, if they injure or kill a road worker, cyclist or pedestrian, then the Ontario Good Roads Association, many health care advocates and we are calling for tougher penalties that include driver education, a driver suspension until that driver education is done and a requirement that the driver turn up to court and listen to victim impact statements.

We've talked to lawyers about what this process looks like today. If a driver injures or kills someone, often they walk away with a fine of a few hundred dollars. Lawyers I've talked to have described the impact of having a driver come in and having to reckon with the consequences of their actions by listening to victim impact statements, and it can be profound. That is the goal. The goal is to ensure that drivers who behave in this way are motivated, incented, to never do it again, so driver suspension, driver education and listening to victim impact statements are key.

I would like the Ontario government to bring in a Vision Zero law, just like BC and Alberta have done, so that we move forward with sensible rules around road use that reduce the number of injuries and deaths on our roads to zero. Protected bike lanes are part of that, and re-designing intersections so that they are safe, because that's often where the accidents, the collisions, occur, especially for seniors and kids. Proper enforcement of our road rules is essential.

I hear from my northern members about what we can do to make our roads safe for drivers and truckers up north: clearing snow quickly on northern highways; improving training and oversight of the trucking industry, to ensure safety. So it's a small step in the right direction to focus on the safety of construction workers—good. I would like to see this government go further.

Then in schedule 3, essentially, there are some changes to the Occupational Health and Safety Act. It lets the Chief Prevention Officer approve training programs in areas outside of Ontario, so workers who are trained elsewhere can be credentialized, and can come here and work here. It's certainly supportable.

Maybe this is something that will come out later: I had some questions on what sectors this would apply to. The trades, certainly. Does it apply to the health care sector? I had some questions about that. If it does, good.

Also, there are a few other things it does on health and safety that I'd like to touch on. It allows the establishment of a workers' safety committee on a project, like a construction site, so there are workers and employers making sure that the construction site is safe. It also increases maximum fines for violations under the Ontario Health

and Safety Act to \$2 million. All those proposed changes are certainly supportable.

When I read about schedule 3, I think about what's missing, what's not in it and what needs to be changed. I think about how one of my members recently talked about how coroners used to investigate deaths on construction sites to ensure that they do not happen again, and to ensure that death is not in vain. It makes a lot of sense. It's not here in the bill.

I think about the fact that when companies are not keeping a safe workplace, unfortunately they are rarely found guilty, and if they are found guilty, the government has never issued a maximum fine on a company. They've never issued a maximum fine. So when we're talking about the schedule about the decision to increase the maximum fine, I am asking this government to also look at enforcing the rules we have, and ensuring that adequate, proper fines are given to companies that consistently break the law. It's not just about changing the legislation; it's about the regulations, the bylaw officers and the enforcement.

What comes to mind for me is that example of Fiera Foods. I'm sure many of you have heard of this company. It is a notorious company. Five workers have been killed at Fiera Foods. This stuff is hard to read, so I'm going to give a light overview. One was caught in a conveyor belt. One individual was killed by a reversing truck in an area with poor lighting and no signs. It was clearly identified that the company was not doing enough to ensure that that individual was safe with the trucker reversing. One woman was killed because her hijab was caught in a conveyer belt—unbelievable.

1720

This started an investigation into Fiera Foods. They had a reporter go in as an undercover worker and this undercover reporter was given five minutes of safety training in a workplace that already had a track record of people being killed—killed on the factory floor. They were paid in cash with no pay stub and no deductions at a payday lender. So it's a notorious company.

What we have found here is that, unfortunately, the company was fined nowhere near the maximum and there were no criminal penalties, even though it is clear that this company had created working conditions where workers were getting killed again and again and again.

Now, we have heard from the Ontario Federation of Labour very clearly that if you kill a worker, then jail time needs to be on the table. Jail time needs to be on the table. I hope that the government takes these egregious instances seriously because they should not be happening in Ontario workplaces, and some employers are clearly not taking the steps necessary to ensure that workers get home at the end of the day safely and in one piece, which means tougher penalties are needed and they need to be applied.

I want to recognize my colleague the MPP for Toronto—Danforth and the OFL for their recent bill to bring in a plan to ensure that workers in Ontario are protected from extreme heat in the workplace. We know that with the climate crisis, rising temperatures and extreme weather

events, workers who work outside—garbage workers, construction workers, farm workers, road workers—are putting themselves in situations where they could suffer heatstroke and even death because of extreme weather conditions, especially heat.

I would like to see, maybe in an amendment, maybe in Working for Workers bill 7, some recognition of the impact of extreme weather and heat on working conditions and safety, and I would like to see standards put in place by this government—amendments or Working for Workers 7, either one will do fine by me.

Schedule 4 prohibits paralegals and recruiting agencies from taking advantage of people who essentially want to use the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program to come and work here, so ensuring that these recruiting agencies follow all the rules and are not misleading people who want to work here. Essentially, it stops the abuse by recruiters of foreign nationals. It makes a lot of sense. It's certainly supportable. I think we could go a lot further on this, but it's certainly supportable.

I'm going to skip schedule 5. It's good, but I'm just going to skip it. There's not much time.

Hon. Mike Harris: Tell us more about schedule 5 if it's good.

Ms. Jessica Bell: It's good. It's supportable.

I want to talk about schedule 6. Schedule 6 talks about who is eligible for workplace safety and insurance. Essentially, the bill changes it so firefighters, volunteer firefighters and fire inspectors who have served for 10 years or more and who are diagnosed with kidney cancer or colorectal cancer are covered under the WSIB. It's certainly supportable.

It remains an open question on this side of the House whether wildland fighters are going to be included in this legislation, because they are firefighters too. It remains an open question, and we need certainty on whether this bill will cover wildland firefighters. We have been advocating for that inclusion for some time.

Then I think about what is missing in this bill when we're talking about workplace safety and insurance and the WSIB. I think about the fact that this government is looking at giving back \$2.5 billion to employers because the WSIB has a surplus. That's a lot of money. I think about how the WSIB is in one of the healthiest financial positions it has been in for a long time, and it is not giving out the money that it needs to give out to eligible injured workers. It is giving money back to employers. It is in a solid financial position. But on the outside, we have workers who have been injured on the job—permanently incapacitated in some cases—living in poverty, supporting a family, who are being denied access to insurance so they can continue to live their life and pay their bills. That is a huge concern.

It is true that the majority of workers who are injured—about 80% of them—recover and go back to work. But then every year there are 15,000 to 17,000 people who are permanently injured or have chronic injuries, and we need to make sure that they are cared for as well. That is very important. That is why it is important that we—I would

like this government to address the issue of deeming. Deeming is a situation where workers are denied access to WSIB because they are eligible for a job that does not exist. That shouldn't be happening in Ontario. It is also important that workers get adequate WSIB funding. So that if they are injured, they are paid fairly. I would like to see those changes in the bill, as well.

In conclusion, this is number 7—number 6; sorry, I'm losing track. These are piecemeal changes to the working conditions that Ontario workers are facing. What I would like to see, what I think many workers would like to see, is something more significant, something more meaningful, so that we can address the gap between the rich and everyone else; so we can help workers, the working poor, the working class and the middle class. That means raising the minimum wage so you can afford the rent and pay your bills. That means making it easier to join a union. It means ensuring that we have paid sick days, that we reclassify gig workers as employees. That we get rid of permanent temporary work and that we bring in pay equity—

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

Questions?

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: I want to thank the member from University–Rosedale for their very thoughtful and thorough comments on the bill.

One of the things that I found very encouraging, from a number of members of the opposition, today, is how many different items of the bill they have described as supportable, which I think is really encouraging. We know that no bill can be entirely comprehensive, and there'll always be additional things that we might like to see. But on the whole, it seems that the vast majority of these items have been described as supportable.

I want to ask the member from University–Rosedale, what is your favourite element of this bill, and can we expect you to support it when the vote comes?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you for the question. As I was going through the bill—I don't want to play favourites. There are some measures in this bill that are certainly supportable: the protected leave of parents, of the people who are sick; the small changes to road safety to ensure that construction workers and road workers are protected. These are reasonable measures.

But we've also been pretty clear here that we need to see a whole lot more if we want to address some of the very serious issues that we're seeing in our workplace. People deserve a living wage. It should be easy to join a union. People should be protected from companies like Uber who take advantage of workplace rules. There is a whole lot more that we can do, and my hope is that we'll see this in amendments or in a future bill.

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

MPP Jamie West: The member opposite earlier talked about how employers pay into WSIB so they should get the money back. I want to talk about Mike Quenneville. He's a miner who died from cancer. I got permission from his widow, Celine, to talk about Mike. Mike spent his life

fighting WSIB for a variety of workplace injuries: carpal tunnel, white hands, chronic pain. He also spent a career underground, and unfortunately was diagnosed with lung cancer that metastasized to his brain. He passed away in the spring of 2023. WSIB determined his injury was only 56% body impairment. So it's non-economic loss. The award that Mike's widow was offered was \$28,000 for Mike's life.

Celine had to take several months off to care for Mike in his final days. The WSIB offered her a pathetic \$600 as a caretaker allowance. Even in death, Mike and his family continue to fight the WSIB. Would you agree with the members opposite in the Conservative Party that employers like this deserve to have that money back because it was theirs in the first place.

1730

Ms. Jessica Bell: That's a very hard story to hear, and my heart goes out to the widow of Mike, to Celine, because that's a very difficult situation to be in.

It is appropriate that you brought that story up now, because it identifies some of the flaws with our WSIB system. If someone is experiencing lung cancer and brain cancer, they are in a situation where they should be eligible for WSIB if they're in that situation that you're in. My hope is that if someone is injured on the job—they are permanently injured or have chronic injuries—then they shouldn't have to jump through hoop after hoop after hoop and then have to go through an appeal process just to get the funding that they have already paid into and that they are eligible for. It makes a lot of sense.

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: As the member opposite knows, we do need more doctors in our province. And what this bill does to offer is, it will help expand immigration pathways for self-employed physicians, and it will help fill some vital gaps in Ontario's health care system. This bill will provide practical solutions to these long-standing challenges.

So my question to the member from University–Rosedale is, will you work with us and help in creating this solution to address a critical health care labour shortage?

Ms. Jessica Bell: In my riding the family doctor shortage is acute. In Toronto there are 500,000 people who do not have access to a family doctor. We also know that the Ontario government spends the least amount of money on health compared to every other province—every other province—per capita. That is a huge concern.

When we're looking at addressing the family doctor shortage and the primary care provider shortage, yes, we absolutely need to fast-track the credentialization of foreign-trained health care workers, including doctors, so that they can provide care to people in Ontario. And it is essential that we invest in family health teams, in nurse practitioner-led clinics, in ensuring that health care workers are paid properly so that they don't leave and just go to Abu Dhabi or Texas or Alberta, which is what many of them are doing right now. There is a comprehensive approach that we need to ensure everyone has—

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

Further questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I want to thank the member from University–Rosedale for actually starting her comments off as a mother who was concerned about her daughter's safety. I think if we carry this intention forward with pieces of legislation, we'll develop better pieces of legislation.

Also, I want to thank her for talking about Amina Diaby who was the 23-year-old temp worker who died at Fiera Foods. I have her picture on my desk because she was training to be a nurse in Ontario. She was only on the job for three weeks. She had no training. And she died there. And Fiera Foods really did not pay a significant fine, I would have to say.

It's also interesting that we're talking about the sixth iteration of this piece of legislation. I have talked to the minister about the fact that the Ontario Human Rights Commission has found that 71% of female restaurant workers experience sexual harassment at work.

To the member of University–Rosedale, where do you think this government could improve on health and safety, particularly for vulnerable women, in Ontario?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Waterloo for that question. I frequently hear about the need for the Ontario government to just enforce your own workplace laws. If someone has an employer that is not paying them properly, taking wages out of their paycheque, then they should have a number to call, and that employer should pay that person. It's really that simple.

You talked a little bit about women. I would very much like this government to take pay equity seriously. That means ensuring that midwives have wage parity to people who perform similar work; to stop spending literally millions of dollars on lawsuits to suppress the wages of public service workers, including health care workers. There's a lot this government can do if we're talking about women in—

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

Further questions?

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for her comments on the bill. I wanted to ask about the elements of the bill concerning Ontario immigrant nominees from the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program because there have been concerns about unethical practices by some representatives—repeatedly raised—and these bad actors exploit newcomers. This bill would, if passed, crack down on these representatives who exploit newcomers. The bill proposes to introduce tougher penalties, increased fines, multi-year bans for violations etc.

I'm just curious whether those elements of this important part of the legislation would be enough to allow the member to support the bill.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Bringing in tougher penalties to companies that knowingly mislead people who want to move to Ontario and work here is certainly supportable.

What I would like to see from this government is some moves to ensure there's an enforcement piece to this because a law—if it's just passed here and not enforced, it's not worth a lot, but if it's properly enforced then it starts to mean something. So I'd like to see that piece as well.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): We're going to move to further debate.

Hon. Graham McGregor: I want to thank all my colleagues for a wonderful debate on what this Parliament and what this Legislature should be doing to support workers across Ontario. Frankly, I would say that, given what workers do to build our province—building our roads, our bridges, our hospitals and so many other things—keeping us healthy—I would say that, as a government, I don't know if we can ever do enough to support workers, but we can sure as heck try.

The Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development and the wonderful parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development have done a wonderful job, as well as our whole team. I want to thank them deeply for putting a thoughtful bill before this House that I certainly intend to support—I'll take away the mystique, take away the guessing game—but, frankly, all members of this House should consider supporting.

One of the reasons why I'm rising in support of Working for Workers 6—wow, six already; this is our sixth Working for Workers bill that we've been able to put forward—one of the great initiatives that is being put forward in this bill is the work that we are doing to address that the federal immigration system has created through the federal government's neglect and mismanagement. The federal government has destroyed an immigration system they created; frankly, they've shattered the consensus that we have here in Canada surrounding immigration and the trust of people in the system.

Newcomers that come to Canada to build a better life for not only themselves, but for their families, are not given the tools and opportunities to succeed that they once had. But the federal government's policy failures don't land on the doorstep of Rideau Cottage, they don't land on the doorstep of Parliament Hill—they land on the doorstep of mayors like our mayor in Brampton, Mayor Brown, or here in Toronto, Mayor Olivia Chow. Our provincial government is listening to these mayors, as well as the service providers and newcomers who rely on a properly functioning immigration system—a system with integrity.

Like so many Canadians, immigrants come to this province to work hard, build a better life for their family and contribute to a stronger Ontario. This is the dream that people buy into when they come to our country, when they join the Ontario, the Canadian family. This is the dream that every single member of this House should be fighting to protect and enhance to the best of our ability.

Now struggling to navigate a confusing, everchanging federal immigration system, many newcomers put their trust in immigration consultants. Many of these immigration consultants are diligent and honest, but there are bad

actors who exploit vulnerable newcomers, scamming them out of their life savings, lying to them with fake job acceptance letters or coercing them into forging documents, jeopardizing their immigration status.

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Imagine the courage it must take to start a new life somewhere else, many times in a country where the first language is not the same first language in the country that you are leaving from. You meet a well-dressed, well-put-together immigration consultant who promises you that he will help you navigate the system, and then find out that this immigration consultant has been in the process of submitting fraudulent documents, playing with the lives and the future of not only you but your family that you're looking to bring on this journey as well, jeopardizing your immigration status and, in many cases, forcing some immigrants into even more exploitative situations.

This is happening because our system is broken. While the federal government is responsible for issuing visas and making decisions on permanent residency, each province is able to accelerate that process for approximately 7% of immigrants with the most in-demand skills. These are skills like skills in health care, skills like technology, the skilled trades—all skills where we need people to step up and face the challenges and the demands of our growing communities, but also our ever-changing economies.

In Ontario, we have that program. We call that program the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program, or the OINP. This program, unfortunately, is a prime target for fraudulent immigration representatives to scam newcomers out of their life savings in exchange for a faster path to permanent residency. If passed, this bill that is before the House will take action to strengthen and protect our immigration system and crack down on those bad actors.

The provincial government has legislation here that, if passed, will crack down on immigration scams by creating new standards and enforcement tools for immigration consultants and representatives who consult on OINP applications. These are new standards that are being proposed in this legislation that will require representatives to be accountable to and honest with the immigrants they're working for.

We're proposing standards that would require representatives to:

(1) Have a written contract with OINP applicants—I think that's common sense. I think that's something that every member of this House should easily be able to support, the idea that, at the bare minimum, these consultants should have a written contract with the applicant that they are representing;

(2) Provide proof of their registration or their licence so applicants know who they're dealing with, bringing some much-needed transparency to this process; and

(3) Ensure that Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program applicants can access their own Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program file.

If immigration representatives don't meet these standards, they will have the book of law thrown at them. We will impose bans from working on OINP applications—up

to a lifetime ban if they commit crimes like human trafficking and withholding passports. For the immigration representatives who think that immigrants getting scammed is just the cost of doing business, we're making sure they feel the consequences. This bill aims to do this by imposing fines for counselling an applicant to commit fraud on their OINP application, regardless of if the representative was paid for the service. That builds on measures that were taken in the summer to increase the minimum monetary penalty for dishonest representatives from \$2,000 to \$10,000. These measures are part of our next instalment.

We need to crack down on bad actors—frankly, these scumbags—who are gaming the system, who are selling a false bill of goods to newcomers, new Canadians who come to our country to build a better life, come to our province to build their life, have skills that we need in those in-demand sectors that I mentioned. Let's crack down on scumbag consultants who take advantage of these vulnerable people. I think that's a great thing. I think that's something every member of this House should be able to support.

The success of our province, the success of our country was built in large part through an immigration system with integrity, Madam Speaker. My own family, my own parents came from—please don't tell my mother I am aging her, Madam Speaker, but my own mother came from Belfast, and I won't say the decade because I've thought better of it. My own father came from Scotland, from Edinburgh, Speaker, and I won't age him either—and I hope that the member for Essex doesn't rat me out. He looks like he might want to.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Before or after World War II?

Hon. Graham McGregor: I'm not going to put that on the record either, member for Essex. You could show us your own birth certificate, sir.

Anyway, Madam Speaker, I'll get back to the bill and why it's important. We're very much a country built by our immigration system. I was lucky to be born in Brampton, Ontario, at the Peel Memorial Hospital, but even more fortunate to grow up in a diverse community where many folks are first generation like myself or, frankly, newcomers to our country. I hear that the Associate Minister of Housing, who came to Canada to lead a better life, fled persecution to build a better life here and what he has been able to accomplish—not only becoming the Associate Minister of Housing, but as the Associate Minister of Transportation, implementing the One Fare system to help immigrants just like him and the same newcomers, the same young people, to put money back into their pockets—that's a beautiful thing. That is exactly what this country and what this province is built on. While we are not accountable for the 100%, by preserving the integrity as best we can for that 7% that provinces are accountable to, well, Madam Speaker, that's a dang good thing and it's about dang time.

Now, it's not only enough to preserve the integrity of our immigration system, we also need to make sure that our province is welcoming in other ways and able to

expand with our growing population. You look at a province like Ontario, we're 16 million people. When the heck did that happen? I feel like I blink sometimes and we—once upon a time we were 14 million, and now we're 16 million, and we're continuing to grow.

Before this government took office, we were around an \$800-billion economy, and now it's \$1.3 trillion. It's over a trillion-dollar economy in Ontario. We are growing rapidly, Madam Speaker. That means that we need new hospitals built. That means that we need new roads built. That means that we need to build new schools, new post-secondary opportunities. That means that we need to build economic opportunity. We need jobs and growth for our economy so that people have somewhere to work so that they're able to put food on their table and look after their kids.

And all of those things that I talked about, Madam Speaker, all of those require workers, and not only in construction. You talk about hospital construction, the amount of work that goes in—and I've learned since I got elected, Madam Speaker, that there is a lot of design work on the front end that goes into these things, never mind what happens when they're under construction. But you think about the thousands and thousands of man hours that go into that and the workers needed for that, well, where are those workers going to come from? And if we don't step up to protect workers, how can we expect them to do these jobs if we can't even guarantee that they can do these jobs safely?

Passing legislation like this to support those workers that are building our province, that are building our prosperity, is critically important, Madam Speaker, and something that we need to continue to champion. It's something that we need to continue to enhance. It's something that every member of this House should continue to work on and, I would say, is a high priority for my constituents in Brampton North but also for residents across Ontario.

I note that this bill will also involve recognizing Skilled Trades Week. There used to be a time that the skilled trades were looked down on, Madam Speaker. In fact, in many places they're still looked down on. The reality is that when you've got a job in the trades, you've got a career for life, and these are high-paying jobs, well-paying jobs because they're so in demand and because our province is growing so rapidly. So by recognizing Skilled Trades Week, not only will that help us give more opportunity to workers; frankly, when we have a labour shortage like we do, it's necessary for the economy to continue to grow.

1750

I see that we're also working in this bill to make it easier to be a foreign-trained doctor, a foreign-trained health care worker, making that easier, making that simpler. It's something that I think many constituents—mine as well—many constituents in Brampton that came here with a medical licence from somewhere else are in another profession here in Ontario simply because their skills weren't recognized and some of them have done really well. I think of my friend Mr. Khawaja in Heart Lake who

owns three gas stations, maybe four now, actually—probably four by the time that I've given this speech. I mean, this guy is an incredible entrepreneur, a big family man, always does a charity event off Mayfield Road at his gas station in partnership with A&W every year. He's making so much money, even if you offered him a doctor's salary, I don't know if he would take it today, frankly, Madam Speaker. But the reality is that we need doctors, right?

We're building 50 new hospital capital projects across Ontario, including the Peel Memorial hospital in my own riding—in my own city, pardon me; in the member for Brampton Centre's riding but in my own city. It's the same hospital that I was born in that the Liberals closed back in 2007. Righting a historical wrong doesn't make that right, but it's not just enough to build a building; we need the doctors, we need the health care staff that can support that.

This ties into our initiatives around expanding our medical schools. For the first time ever we're going to have a medical school right in the heart of Brampton, the first expansion—

Interjections.

Hon. Graham McGregor: That deserves a bigger applause. Come on. The first time ever—mostly, I just really needed a drink of water. Now I've got ice in my mouth.

I'll tell you, Madam Speaker, that for the first time ever in Brampton, the first time in over 100 years in the GTA where, finally, we will have Brampton students being able to become Brampton medical students, eventually becoming Brampton doctors, serving Brampton families. This is a made-in-Brampton solution. I can't wait for them to open their doors next year. It's exciting progress and much needed in a community like mine, where we need the health care help. Brampton's a community—we're rapidly growing. We've doubled in size over the last 20 years. Our infrastructure hasn't doubled with it, and our health care capacity hasn't doubled with it. The residents that I am lucky to represent, the residents that I call friends and neighbours, they deserve the same access to health care that anybody in Ontario deserves. Frankly, with TMU opening, allowing more doctors to have a world-class education to serve our residents, I can't think of a better thing than that, and that's paired with our initiatives to make it easier to get foreign-trained health care workers through the system.

I heard a little bit of consternation, I suppose, from colleagues across about the WSIB premiums, and I just want to reiterate for the record and for anybody listening at home—and pardon me if I don't have this number right—96% of WSIB cases are approved, which is a high rate, and by driving efficiencies to be able to put some of that money back into the economy while still running 96% as a clearance rate, that's—

Interjections.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Gosh, the NDP can call that what they like. I call that good governance, Madam Speaker, and I think their constituents would as well. I know they've got many small businesses in their own

ridings. You think about small businesses in Sudbury or Waterloo, Toronto, in northwest Toronto, where my good buddy from Humber River is—when they get a little bit more money back into their pocket, they invest it into the community. They invest it in hiring more workers and expanding their business.

Interjection.

Hon. Graham McGregor: I just heard “absolutely” from my dear friend the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Gaming. You want to talk about a small business success story and immigration success story, his dad came to Canada from Korea, and his first job was literally picking worms out of the ground, to opening up a convenience store, to expanding that to being massively successful and marrying a beautiful woman. The minister is—

Hon. Stan Cho: He did, yes—much too beautiful for him, absolutely.

Hon. Graham McGregor: Much too beautiful for him. We will put that on the record as well.

This is the type of Canada, the type of Ontario that we need to be building, where we can support our small businesses, we can support our newcomers, we can help build the dream of Canadian citizenship, of Ontario citizenship, and support workers while we are doing that and putting it all together in a way that not only serves us for the needs of today, for the needs of 2024, but build a strong, sustainable forward-thinking, forward-looking future province of Ontario for many generations to come.

I see my time is short. I had another 10 minutes to go, but I will opine at another time. I would just say this is a very, very good bill. I hope all colleagues of the House consider supporting it. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member of Timiskaming–Cochrane, point of order?

Mr. John Vanthof: I seek unanimous consent of the House that visitors in the public galleries be permitted to wear orange shirts in recognition of Indian residential school survivors for the remainder of the sessional day.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Mr. Vanthof is seeking the unanimous consent of the House that visitors in the public galleries be permitted to wear orange shirts in recognition of Indian residential school survivors for the remainder of the day. Agreed? Agreed.

Questions?

Ms. Doly Begum: I listened to the member from Brampton North very intently. One of the things he has talked about was schedule 4, which is the Ontario Immigration Act, 2015, and one of the new policies that will come into effect, which is the banning of the application.

As I read this bill, I worry a little bit whether this bill will infringe upon the rights of the applicants who are the newcomers, the immigrants who are actually applying, because it is a little bit unclear. I am happy to have a conversation with the minister and the government members because I don't know if the members understand. Consultants do not make the applications on their name for an applicant.

associated with the pursuit of truth and reconciliation at the sites of Indian residential schools across Canada, was borne from the debates that took place here, including those led by the member from Kiiwetinoong, myself and others who have had the chance to discuss this.

For the purposes of our government, we mobilized resources immediately, and those resources were targeted in two key areas. One was mental health and addictions, a recognition that the legacy of Indian residential school has had a profound impact not just on survivors, but on their children and their children's children and, likely, their children's children's children, and, in fact, their communities and First Nations across Canada.

The other part, for the purposes of my presentation tonight and the discussion, was for four key areas. This is after the mental health support resources, because they were also complemented by other resources from other ministries, most notably the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions and the important work my colleague Minister Tibollo is doing in his work. There were four pillars, they've been described as; I see them a little bit differently. I am not opposed to the word "pillars"—in fact, I think it's a good way to organize how we think about them—but they can also be seen as stages. They are as follows:

Identification: This would cover activities like uncovering anomalies at former Indian residential school sites. This is an activity that is continuing today. This would be described substantively as the exercise of discovery and identifying findings that are worth pursuing in the sense that they may implicate burial sites at Indian residential school locations. There are 18 in Ontario. That's a lot of schools, Madam Speaker. And more than a few of them are in the Kenora–Rainy River and Kiiwetinoong districts, so the member from Kiiwetinoong and I are pretty invested in this subject matter and the activities that I'm describing now.

Investigation is the second one. This would be ground-penetrating radar. The province, beyond the financial commitments, has mobilized state-of-the-art equipment to support following up on these findings that have compelled us to go further. They include cadaver dog searches. This has, in fact, occurred at Indian residential school sites in the Kenora–Rainy River districts.

The third one is **protection**. An example of this would be repatriation. This ought to put a big lump in anybody's throat. This is about the prospect and the reality that, either at Indian residential school sites or other parts of the province, for one reason or another, there were bodies found of children who attended Indian residential school.

Recently, the Premier and I had—I won't call it an opportunity, but participated in a drum circle at Long Lake #58 reserve with Chief Judy Desmoulin and the family of a young boy named Percy Onabigon. Percy went to Indian residential school at a very young age. He developed tuberculosis, and he was buried in southwestern Ontario, subsequent to his time at Indian residential school and an extended hospitalization.

1820

When the Premier and I caught wind of this, we immediately sought to reach out to the chief, to the new grand chief, Linda Debassige, and the family. This was just weeks ago, actually. We assured the family in person that we would be involved in supporting all of the resources required to repatriate young Percy.

It's hard to keep it together when you talk about something like that, Madam Speaker.

There will likely be others, and the government will continue, as it has over the past couple of years, to ensure that there are significant resources for this activity.

The final pillar, if you will, and/or stage, depending on how you view it—and it could be open to debate—is commemoration and memorialization. Some of those activities have occurred, but most of them have occurred in acknowledgement that something significant happened that the rest of the country who didn't attend an Indian residential school has come to full recognition that this has happened.

Meanwhile, in our schools, children are learning, not just during the week but on that day in particular, in their classrooms, the order of magnitude and the scope of the Indian residential school legacy and its impact on survivors, generations of them, their families and their communities.

I have attended Indian residential school survivor group sessions. I have heard nothing but high levels of satisfaction for the support that the government of Ontario has given for these forums and for the activities that I have just set out: the four pillars, the four stages, if you will.

And so, Madam Speaker, it would beg the question—and the member has advanced a private member's bill—as to whether this is the time for a statutory holiday. We can get to the point right now where it is already, in Ontario, a day of reflection. In fact, I have heard from a number of survivors, I've heard from a number of Indigenous leaders, who are not completely persuaded that we are at a time and place where a holiday—writ large, a day off—is necessarily the best thing.

Because this is about school, right? This is about forced Indian residential school, and we have First Nations children attending schools, many in their own communities. We have non-First Nations students going to school on that day and coming home with questions that they want answers to, Madam Speaker, and it occurs on that day.

If that day is a pure holiday at this point in time, when the three other pieces that I mentioned—before commemoration and memorialization, it compels me to think about an issue of timing. Because I have engaged informally—and I'm not aware of a record of consultation from the member opposite. We talked about it a couple of months ago when he was considering bringing this forward. I'm not sure if he has a formal record of consultation. But it would be fair enough, as a survivor, if he has simply heard from people in communities.

I too have engaged to a large extent with survivors and with First Nations leaders on this subject matter. The sense

that I get, Madam Speaker, is that there is not consensus at this time. And it's not to suggest for a moment that there won't be at some particular time. But the activities that are going on right now are telling an important story of a place we might go to—a day we might have that would indeed be more than a day of reflection and more than a holiday a couple of weeks before Thanksgiving, and a place in time that would be akin to national Remembrance Day or others like it—that would appreciate and understand the full scope of it.

For these reasons, at this time the government will not be in a position to support this private member's bill.

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

MPP Jill Andrew: I'm proud to stand in support of MPP Sol Mamakwa's Bill 221. He's calling on this government to have the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, September 30—Orange Shirt Day—declared a statutory holiday, mirroring its current status federally and mirroring other provinces, including British Columbia, who have done this.

We need a day of reflection where everyone in Ontario, from our children to our elders, can reflect on the legacy of colonialism, anti-Indigenous racism and the horrific abuses suffered by Inuit, First Nations and Métis people. We're talking about Canada's role in cultural genocide. We're talking about unmarked child graves. We all need to take time to learn about this, and I want to say that it's not the role of only Indigenous community members to lead this education. We should be leading through our homes, through our communities, through our schools. This "holiday" can do that.

Residential schools ended in 1996. To me, that was yesterday, frankly. Everyone needs to understand the historical and the ongoing pain and impact of Indigenous residential schools. This government must support this bill. It gives them a chance to redeem themselves of some of the terrible choices they've made, such as cutting the then Ministry of Indigenous Affairs' funding and cutting the Indigenous Culture Fund, which was a clear commitment to the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The Indigenous Culture Fund was created to support Indigenous communities, to help them build traditional culture and knowledge capacity, and yet it was cut.

Passing Bill 221 is an opportunity to support Indigenous communities who are calling for this very piece of legislation.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: To this day, First Nations families are searching for answers, looking for their loved ones who were forcibly taken from their homes and sent to residential schools. Many are still grieving those who never returned. Generations of children were stolen, and with them, entire communities, cultures, languages and traditions were erased. The history of residential schools is a tragic—and as I was actually looking at this, I feel like

"tragic" is not the right word to use. I feel ashamed that sometimes we use words like that because there aren't really good words to talk about the injustice, the sufferings of residential schools, how shameful and inhumane that was—that reality of Canada's past.

As is with colonization and with cultural genocide, that pain they caused is not confined to the past; it is carried forward by survivors, their families and their communities. I am proud to sit next to my colleague Sol Mamakwa who is proposing this bill, who is a survivor of a residential school. Every single day, I feel so proud to stand here and speak to who's bringing this bill forward.

Words of acknowledgement are not enough; we must take real actions. By marking September 30 a statutory day of reflection in Ontario, we take one step towards fulfilling the TRC commission's calls—now call number 8. This is more than marking a day, Speaker. It's about ensuring that every Ontarian has the opportunity to pause, reflect and learn about the painful legacy of Indian residential schools. We are seeing a dangerous rise in hate and denialism and an attempt to erase the truth of residential schools. Let us be clear: Denialism is a form of oppression, and it must be called out and condemned whenever it arises. We cannot reconcile something that we do not understand. Education is key.

Today, I thank my colleague and my seatmate, and I call on this government to pass this legislation and demonstrate all of our commitment to truth and reconciliation.

1830

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

MPP Lise Vaugeois: It is an honour to rise in support of declaring September 30, a day of reflection on the Indian residential schools, as a statutory holiday.

All Ontarians need a day to recognize that wherever oppression exists there are always benefits that flow to other people because of that oppression, material and psychological benefits that include not having to notice the existence of oppression, physical, sexual and emotional abuse building shame around anything to do with one's family, language and culture. And even if these indignities and harms had not been commonplace, the violence of removing children from their families was more than enough to shatter people's lives in ways most of us who are not Indigenous have difficulty imagining.

We have reminders here at Queen's Park of these histories that are as much a part of the present as the past: the children's shoes in front of the boxed-up monument of Sir John A. Macdonald and the river of children's shoes on the wall of the Gathering Place inside this building. These are tangible reminders of the children taken away and the children that never came home.

I would like to close with the final stanzas of a poem by Cree writer Louise Halfe:

A blanket of deep earth
Covered fingers entwined
Arms around each other.

We have been
Waiting.

It is time to release
This storm

That consumes all this nation.
Awasis, this spirit-light, these angels
Dance in the flame.

The bones
Will share their stories.

Listen. Act.
These children are ours.
Could be.....Yours.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: It's always an honour to rise in this House, and today, I do so with tremendous pride in speaking in honour and support of Bill 221, Day of Reflection for Indian Residential Schools Act, 2024, tabled by MPP Sol Mamakwa.

Declaring this day a holiday for the Indian residential schools is indeed a call to action from the 94 recommendations from the TRC. We must do everything we can to honour the work of those who laboured to provide us such a critical blueprint for reconciliation.

The trauma that persists today is one that has been damaging to Canadians and one that continues to exist in Indigenous communities.

I'm very proud that in Toronto we have one of the largest off-reserve populations of Indigenous people, totalling over 100,000 people, and this is probably an under-counting.

Speaker, I want to extend my heartfelt appreciation to many organizations in Toronto Centre who have been working to advance the betterment of Indigenous people, organizations such as the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council, the federation of Indigenous friendship centres and the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business, including also the Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre, who actually built this beautiful monument, a legacy for us in the city of Toronto, through the Spirit Garden now sitting at Nathan Phillips Square.

I want to dedicate my remarks to two individuals who have led this country, who have led our communities, and that includes the Honourable Murray Sinclair and former Elder Wanda Whitebird. She was a labour activist and a fierce fighter. I think we would honour them extremely well by supporting this bill.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an incredible honour to be able to stand here today. I have had the honour and privilege—while we're in Toronto, I live in the same building as the member for Kiiwetinoong, and we walk to work every morning. I knew him for quite a while before I found out he was a residential school survivor. But I got to see the

experience—I didn't experience the same experience as he did with the discovery, but it changed my life, because I kind of got to see it beside him. It's something that I don't think—I will never understand, but it was incredible. Walking and stopping in front of the shoes with the member for Kiiwetinoong is not the same as walking in front of those shoes with anyone else.

The first time that the member for Kiiwetinoong was allowed to speak his own language in this House was one of the greatest moments for us all, and I would like to acknowledge the government's work and our work, together, the work of the Legislative Assembly. I would also like to acknowledge that, even now, we have rules that sometimes don't seem to work, like the orange shirts. But I would also like to acknowledge the government and the opposition, along with the Legislative Assembly. We got it done to change that rule for this occasion.

I'm just going to take a moment to explain the next part of this process. So there's no confusion, when I am done speaking, the member from Kiiwetinoong will be asked to speak for two minutes, and there will be a vote. If it passes on voice, if no one says no, it will pass. If someone says no and five people rise, the vote will be deferred until the next sessional day, after question period on Monday. I don't know if the government is going to do that.

I am going to say no, and the reason I'm going to say no is certainly not because I don't support the member from Kiiwetinoong, but as we can all see, many of these seats are empty. Thursday evening, anyone who can goes home to their riding to have supper with their families because their lives are full of events. We all serve the people.

We are going to divide this vote. I will say no. Five of our members will stand—likely all of our members; perhaps more. But what we are doing is so the vote on this will be held Monday after question period so these halls will be full.

The last thing I would like to say is, that vote isn't the last vote that this bill will have. I respect the minister's comments. So if we all vote on Monday to move this bill forward, it will still be able to go to committee, where other people can put their views forward. It will be one step in the journey—hopefully it's a short journey, but one step. That is what is going to happen in the next few minutes. Thank you for your time.

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

Mr. Adil Shamji: I am proud to speak in support of the member from Kiiwetinoong's bill. I know that the member from Algoma-Manitoulin also wishes he could speak. He represents 22 First Nations and, unfortunately, he was denied the opportunity to speak, which is regrettable in our collective path towards truth and reconciliation.

I am proud to rise in this chamber to speak in support of this bill, but I have mixed feelings. I'm also not proud of the fact that I need to. I'm not proud of the fact that the tragedy of the Indian residential school system is one of the greatest stains in our nation's history.

All those opposed, please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the nays have it.

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

Second reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): All matters relating to private members’ public business having been completed, this House stands adjourned until Monday at 10:15 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1846.

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Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
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Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
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