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Mardi
10 décembre 2024

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 10 December 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 10 décembre 2024

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, we'll have a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORT FOR SENIORS AND CAREGIVERS ACT, 2024 LOI DE 2024 SUR LE SOUTIEN AUX PERSONNES ÂGÉES ET AUX FOURNISSEURS DE SOINS

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 9, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 235, An Act to amend the Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021 and the Retirement Homes Act, 2010 / Projet de loi 235, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2021 sur le redressement des soins de longue durée et la Loi de 2010 sur les maisons de retraite.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: It's an honour to rise and speak to this bill, Bill 235, Support for Seniors and Caregivers Act, 2024. The bill is largely supportable. We do notice that there are things in the bill that were proposed by the NDP during the committee stage of the Fixing Long-Term Care Act. We're glad to see these things finally coming to place—that is, funding for dementia and also harsher penalties for individuals within homes who are causing problems, creating abuse for residents in those homes. It is a pity that those things weren't brought in a couple of years ago when they were first suggested, but we are happy to see that they are finally here now.

We don't know yet whether time allocation is going to be called on this particular bill, and I would like to argue against using time allocation. I think it's an important bill and an important issue.

In the last couple of days, I have heard from the Ontario Medical Association, unhappy that they haven't been consulted on this bill. I've also heard from the OLTCC, which is an organization of long-term care organizations, and this is what they say: "OLTCC's board is now analyzing the bill ... and will be preparing feedback and comment on the bill to contribute to the legislative process. While the bill has been introduced, it is normal for bills to go

through committee hearings and clause by clause approval at committee. OLTCC's board will work in the spirit of our vision of all Ontario's living in long-term care receiving excellent care."

What we have been seeing in the last couple of weeks in the House is the consistent, persistent use of time allocation to shut down debate and close the options for the public to have their opportunity to speak to these bills. They're really being rushed through, and the fact that, just in a couple of days, I have heard from people saying, "We really think it's important to have an opportunity to speak to this bill"—I'm quite concerned that that opportunity will not be there.

I went through the bill myself very carefully last night. I'm looking at this, "cultural, linguistic, religious and spiritual needs of residents." Every single long-term care will be required to provide these services, which is great, but I'm wondering how they will be paid for, you know, the administrative side of this, because it's one thing to impose that, to say, "Okay, this is the rule for your long-term care home," but perhaps there will be 20 different cultures represented in that home. What is the process? How are they actually going to fulfill these obligations? What is the money available to fulfill those obligations?

I was looking at: "Every licensee shall ensure that residents are given reasonable opportunity to practise their religious and spiritual beliefs...." Again, the first question that comes to me is: What is reasonable? What's the definition of reasonable?

And then, later: "Persons are guilty of an offence if they abuse or neglect a resident of a long-term-care home...." Again, and perhaps this exists in the previous version of this legislation, I want to know: What's the definition of abuse and neglect? What's the threshold? What's the penalty and so on? I think that's very, very important also for the people who work in the homes, because they need to know what their obligations are, what does it look like and so on.

I think that the concepts that are here are good, but we really need that opportunity to have those public conversations so that we can go through clause-by-clause, clear up anything that's not, perhaps, clear—clear up what's not clear, yes.

Again, it was interesting in speaking with a doctor from Thunder Bay who is the medical director for two long-term-care homes. One of the questions he was asking was not so much in opposition to having nurse practitioners in the role of medical directors, but wondering how it's going to work, how is that going to be paid. Because right now, medical directors are paid, I believe, by the Ministry of

Health, and they're paid 39 cents per resident per day, which amounts to a few thousand dollars. That's not enough to pay for a full-time nurse practitioner in long-term care. To be a medical director, a nurse practitioner presumably is going to be employed on a full-time basis, and it's not going to be a side job, because we know also that we've got these brilliant nurse practitioners who are underemployed right now.

We want to make sure they are able to meet these responsibilities in the best way possible, but we don't know, actually, how it's going to be funded, who's going to be paying for it. These are important questions, and I think they deserve to have answers and they deserve to have an airing in committee, with stakeholders having their opportunity to say where their concerns are.

We're also dealing with a bed shortage in long-term care. On the one hand, only 2,246 units have been built; 30,000 have been promised to be built by 2028, but only just over 2,000 have been built. There are lots of units that are being lost and that is a big part of the problem. Because what we know and what we learned through the Heritage Glen nightmare in Mississauga was that these companies are land trusts: They don't actually exist to provide service; they exist in order to wait until the value of the real estate that they are built on has gone up enough that they can cash in on it. So we are seeing long-term-care homes closing because the real estate is too valuable for seniors. That's not the priority; the priority is to make as much money as possible off the real estate. This is what happened at Heritage Glen. The residence was sold to Minto, and those residents were put in a very, very bad position. And the same thing is happening in long-term care.

Mr. Chris Glover: The taxpayers funded this, right?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Yes, absolutely. Taxpayers have subsidized—have paid, actually—for the care in long-term care. They have also paid for upgrades and all kinds of things to those homes. So the profits that they were able to have after they get rid of the homes—after they get rid of the people in the homes—have actually been facilitated through the public purse, and that is certainly not right.

Mr. Chris Glover: Insane.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Yes.

0910

The other thing that we're dealing with is, we know that we're not yet at four hours of care. I will give the government credit for moving closer to that, but the bottom line is that increasing direct hours of care for long-term care is not going to be solved until staffing shortages are addressed. This is coming from Ricardo McKenzie, director of long-term care for SEIU Healthcare—that's a union representing long-term-care workers, including PSWs and registered practical nurses:

"The issue of staffing shortages won't be solved until workers have stable, well-paying jobs....

"The solution, we believe, I believe, is to provide workers with full-time jobs, middle-class wages, strong benefits and retirement security....

"Until the government and employers do that, the situation regarding the turnover of staff is going to get worse." That's in the words of Ricardo McKenzie.

"Government figures suggest that attrition amongst" PSWs "is as high as 25%"—that's quite high. A quarter of the profession is leaving annually, and according to McKenzie, union data shows that, within long-term-care homes, the turnover is as high as 38%.

You can't meet four hours of care, you can't meet even whatever—you can't meet care without personnel, and you can't have those personnel unless you're offering stable, well-paying, middle-class jobs.

Certainly, our seniors—everybody who needs care and our seniors in particular deserve to have that care. These are things that in fact should be paid for publicly, but not the profit margins. So we also have this tension between for-profit long-term care and community-based or municipally based long-term care. With the private care, you have to generate enough money, you've got to be able to pull money off for shareholder profits; in public care, that is not where money is going. We want to see that money going into care. We want to see a reduction of these for-profit long-term-care spaces, replaced with public long-term care, so that the money that we are paying is going into care and not going into private profits, which is where a lot of the money is going right now.

Again, on the topic of lack of staff, problems with staffing—now this is Lisa Levin, who is the CEO of AdvantAge Ontario:

"One solution that" she "and other community health organizations have been urging for is to equalize wages within the health system as a whole.

"If you're doing a similar job in the community versus in the hospital or in ... education"—or in long-term care or in somebody's home—"you should be getting similar wages, and that's not happening." As a result, we've got constant turnover.

I must say, when we're looking at home care, it's a disaster, because nobody wants to stay working in home care because the wages are abysmal. You're not even paid for your travel time, you're not paid for your parking, so by the time you've covered your expenses, your wage is nothing. It's no surprise that the moment there's an opportunity to go somewhere else, people leave for a better-paying job.

We also know, of course, that one of the major reasons that there is such a shortage of health care workers is Bill 124, which artificially repressed wages and pushed people out of health care, certainly pushed people out of nursing, and we are seeing the effects of that, with hospitals going into deficit because they are spending so much money on agency nurses.

I've got a few other things I would like to talk about while I have the opportunity. I want to come back to the Trespass to Property Act, which is being abused in care homes across the province; I'm aware of 100 cases. We have motion 129, we've got the Residents' Bill of Rights and yet, this is still happening. Why does it happen? Because there are no consequences to the homes. It's like a get-out-of-jail-free card. You're unhappy with somebody who's coming and visiting—I'll just create an

example. I'm going to visit my mother; she's in a home. I'm not happy with the care in the home. I make a fuss about it, and then the home decides that I'm a nuisance and they don't want me there, so they use this Trespass to Property Act—which is actually incorrect; it's not legal to use it in this way, but they use it. They may get a young police officer at the door who has not been trained in the correct use of that act, and they will say, "Okay, you can't be here." So we have a case right now with someone—445 days; even though he has substitute decision-maker rights, he has not been able to see his mother for 445 days.

Mr. Chris Glover: Insane.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Yes. And his father can't go and visit there because his father is disabled and he requires his son to get into the building. So this home has forcibly isolated the mother living in this home for 440 days. It's illegal. The Trespass to Property Act cannot be used by the manager of a home; only the occupant of the unit, so that is the mother, has the right to say yes or no. If somebody is actually a threat or poses a threat to an institution, there are other legal remedies, but those remedies require due process and they require evidence.

What's happening right now is, with this abuse of the Trespass to Property Act, the family member has no choice but to hire a lawyer and go to court. When they go to court, all the court rulings, all the case law says—the judge will say, "You have the right to go back. This Trespass to Property Act is a ticket. I'm throwing it away. It's meaningless. Please, go back and see your mother." But it should not have to be that way. According to the previous long-term-care minister, that was all fixed with the Residents' Bill of Rights, but it's not fixed because this is being abused everywhere.

I see that there is a change in the Retirement Homes Act: "Namely the right to ongoing support from caregivers, and to enable specified senior officials in the ministry ... to provide binding direction as well as recommendations to licensees respecting the prevention and management of specified types of infectious diseases." When I first looked at that, the right to ongoing support from caregivers, I thought that might be a strengthening, but it's not specific enough. Again, this is something that really needs to be addressed at the committee level—it can be addressed.

I've been harping on this now since I was elected, so that's two and a half years—nothing has happened. I have written to every single minister; I've written to the Solicitor General. In fact, one of the problems is that even somebody from the Ministry of Long-Term Care has said, "The Trespass to Property Act can be used in exceptional circumstances." That is not true; that is not correct. The case law does not support that. The Ministry of Long-Term Care needs to figure this out and make a statement to all care homes clarifying that the act cannot be used in that way; that it's creating its own form of abuse—it is a form of abuse. There are other solutions if they have a really serious problem. There are other solutions.

I think that it's probably been forgotten here, but I want to remind people that there are class action lawsuits still in process. So I looked this up. I thought: Oh, maybe it's all done and dusted. But no. March 13, 2024: I see that class

action lawsuits are ongoing against 200 long-term-care homes owned and managed by Chartwell Retirement Residences, Extendicare, Responsive Group, Revera, Schlegel Villages, Sienna Senior Living and their affiliates. Many of these companies, corporations—land trusts, I'm going to call them—have been rewarded with 30-year contracts.

Mr. Chris Glover: Insane.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Yes. Even though many of those places—and I'm thinking of Orchard Villa; it was given a 30-year extension on their lease after being responsible for so many deaths and having had to have the military come in and help out. We know it was appalling. So why the same bad actors have been given extended contracts is—well, why? I don't know why. It's not acceptable and it should never have happened. There's also a class action lawsuit against the previous previous long-term-care minister.

I do want to point out that, in terms of Voula's Law—that's dealing with the misuse of the Trespass to Property Act—I have been in conversation with the current Minister of Long-Term Care and hope that we can actually figure out a path through.

But in my last couple of minutes, I just want to point out that we are still dealing with the effects of Bill 7. I heard recently from a family in the Kenora area, and the father has been sent 75 kilometres away to another town. We know there are no bus services between these towns, and the only family member is his son, who has a disability. So they have said to his son, "Well, why don't you just take a taxi?"

0920

Mr. Chris Glover: Seventy-five kilometres.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Seventy-five kilometres to visit his father. Well, that's not okay. That is not appropriate care for the senior, for the family. That senior has been forcibly isolated because of Bill 7. There has to be better solutions than this.

Mr. Chris Glover: It's okay; they're listening.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Yes.

Catherine Fife's bill, Till Death Do Us Part—it seems like such a simple fix—could be in this bill so that couples are not separated into different homes. It should be an easy fix.

In my last couple of moments, because this is my last chance to speak this term, I just want to go in a slightly different direction to the Working for Workers bill while I have the chance. There is \$2.5 billion of money that should be going to support injured workers. It's money, really, taken, stolen, from injured workers that is being given back as a kind of pre-election perk to employers. Injured workers were promised that their rates would be returned to where they were in 1999—that goes back a long way. Instead, twice, this government has given enormous sums of money that belongs to injured workers back to employers. That is—can I call it criminal? Am I allowed to say that word here? It's certainly shameful. Workers are in poverty because they're not receiving the support they should be receiving from the WSIB.

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: We've seen a lot of bills come and go. I'm wondering if the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North can talk about how it would look to work together to make the bill the best it could be so we don't have to wait a few years for these amendments to come to life. You put forward these amendments; you're seeing them much later. What would it look like if we could all work together right now to do it right the first time?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Certainly, in the opposition side of the House with the independents, with the NDP opposition—wouldn't we love it if, when we went to committee, when we actually had committee, amendments were taken seriously? I think we just had an experience with the bill about dementia care and not a single amendment—I mean, it was clear the decision had been made before we even sat down that nothing was going to be accepted. As far as I know, not a single amendment has been accepted to any legislation.

We should all be working together to get the best possible legislation for the people of Ontario. These should be non-partisan issues.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: The bill before us today proposes a number of things. One of the things that it proposes is the emotion-based care model. These models are proven to be very effective for the well-being of various residents. This is training that's going to be provided and it's going to be paid for. I happen to believe this is very important training and the minister believes it as well. That why it's in the bill.

I think it's going to make an important advancement in the care of residents in long-term care, this emotion-based training. I would like to ask the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North whether she endorses the idea of emotion-based training and funding for this training and whether she can support that and vote for it.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Yes, emotion-based training, I think, has been advocated for for a long time—really, person-centred training. As far as I know, the only money that's been allotted for this bill is specifically for dementia care. Dementia care can be emotion-based, but so can care for all—people in any health care setting—to be acknowledging where they're coming from. I hope that that training willing apply across the board to all people working within long-term care, and yes, I support that.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North for her speech and how this bill affects the individuals in her riding who live in long-term-care homes and support people who live in long-term-care homes.

In my riding, we have the O'Neill Centre, Kensington Gardens and a bunch of other long-term-care homes. When I met with them a few months ago, they brought up some issues. One was, they don't have the infrastructure funding to upgrade their facilities, and the other one was

that they still don't have the staffing they need to provide the kind of quality care that people expect.

Do you see anything in this bill that would address some of those issues around infrastructure and staffing?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: The short answer is no. I think, as I said in my presentation, there are some very significant issues that are interfering with the ability to staff places properly. One of them is pay equity and proper benefits. As far as infrastructure funding goes, I don't believe there's anything at all in the bill that addresses that.

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

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North for your presentation and thank you for your advocacy for the seniors in this province.

In my riding is a tsunami wave of seniors moving into Markham and many, many cities. Because of the demographics, there are so many seniors and seniors' clubs in my riding. The Seniors Active Living Centres Program plays a vital role in enhancing the well-being of seniors not only in my riding but across the province.

I ask the member opposite to explain how this expansion will directly benefit seniors and what the opportunities or initiatives will be in 30 years as part of that growth and a part of this legislation.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I'll just say I'm a little confused because I don't remember seeing that in the bill, but I know it's been talked about. So extending some of the active living things that are happening, for example, in community centres and making it possible for people living in long-term care to access that—I believe that's what has been proposed. Obviously, I think any opportunity for people, wherever they are living, to engage and have social interaction with each other and meaningful interaction is positive.

But I do have to point out again that there is forcible isolation taking place in these homes that shouldn't be happening. It's not even legal, but it's happening because there are no consequences to the homes when they misuse the Trespass to Property Act.

Yes, every opportunity to bring people together is wonderful, but let's also make sure that people aren't being forcibly isolated.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: For three decades, Conservative and Liberal governments have been sacrificing seniors to these for-profit long-term-care homes. The former Conservative government privatized the homes and then started shovelling our tax dollars to these private homes. Those private homes are real estate investment trusts that did not take care of seniors. We saw from the Armed Forces report during the pandemic that seniors were abused and actually died because of the mistreatment they received.

Then this government passed legislation to protect those long-term-care homes from negligence lawsuits, and then they sell the properties, these long-term-care

homes—for-profit corporations sell the long-term-care homes and evict the seniors.

You mentioned also in your remarks that these long-term-care homes are trespassing any family member who complains about the mistreatment of their senior who's in the long-term-care home, and this is forcing isolation. Is there anything in this bill that will protect seniors, that will reverse this practice of sacrificing seniors for corporate profit?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you very much for that question. Unfortunately, no. The practice of selling off the homes is still going to take place. There are still going to be compromises in care because of squeezing out profits wherever possible.

The other thing about the use of the Trespass to Property Act—the improper use of that—is that it creates fear amongst all the residents and all the family members. It's kind of like the kings of old: You only have to chop off one person's head to create fear and get everybody else to fall in line and no longer complain. And that is what's happening in our long-term-care homes right now, that that Trespass to Property Act is used incorrectly—in fact, illegally, because all the case law says so. That creates fear for everybody else, and they won't speak up on behalf of their relatives in care because of it.

0930

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

Mr. Ross Romano: I've listened to the member's comments. I think what we heard—at least myself and several other people who were in the room when the minister spoke with the passion, the conviction about this bill. I think it is something that—clearly there has been a great deal of time, there's a great deal of compassion, there's a great deal of energy that's been put into trying to help our seniors. I hope that the members opposite can appreciate that that is the goal, to help, and that is our intent.

I ask the member opposite, in terms of the challenges she finds with it—which she certainly enumerated, those challenges. But will you not support this bill because of all the good that it is doing? That's my question to the member opposite.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I don't think we have a problem with supporting the bill. My concern is time allocation, because it's not enough that the government side has had opportunities. There needs to be a public opportunity for people to raise their concerns and for the opposition to bring amendments so that we have the best possible bill at this time that really supports seniors.

I trust that the Minister of Long-Term Care has the best interest of seniors at heart. I believe that and so I hope we all have the opportunity—and that time allocation is not used—so that we can all be contributing to the best possible bill.

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I do appreciate when legislation comes our way that doesn't have any toxic ingredients. So this is a bill—I appreciate the Minister of Long-Term

Care's intentions. We've had a chance to talk about long-term care, and I know that she is doing her best to tour the province, meet with individuals in this sector, listen to what they need and the vision for what long-term care can look like.

As a social worker, our motto is “first do no harm,” and I do believe that this bill does no harm. It is a good vision of trying to meet seniors where they're at when it comes to their spirituality, their language needs and their culture. I do appreciate that the RNAO likes the expanded scope for nurse practitioners, giving more medical oversight in long-term-care homes. So I do appreciate this and I do support the bill.

That said, I'm discouraged as a newb by the expedited pace of the way legislation is coming forward. I'm a keener, I like to do my homework, I like to get in there. But the pace at which these bills are coming forward is so fast, it doesn't give us enough time, I think, to do fulsome research—and then without committee. As the social policy committee, we were there on the dementia care bill. It was beautiful to hear from experts. I got to meet industry leaders—geriatricians talking about the gaps even for geriatricians. They can't even fill the medical seats.

Dr. Ingram in Peterborough, a geriatrician expert, said they have 30 empty seats because they're underpaid. So the underpay, the pay equity, is in geriatrics. A friend of mine, Jason Deneault, works in a senior's care home as a recreation coordinator. He hasn't had a raise in 15 years. So not only do PSWs need pay equity, but we need to see this across the sector, especially when it comes to agency nurses.

My neighbour, who is a practical nurse, said she had an agency nurse come up to her and she's getting paid more than twice as much. She goes to her and says, “Can you tell me what I'm supposed to do? I don't know where I'm supposed to go. I've never been here before.” And she's kind of aghast at the lack of value for our permanent full-time staff. I think what we can at least expect is a living wage for PSWs and for all the others in the sector.

Another thing that's missing that I'd love to see is acknowledgement of the experience of 2SLGBTQIA+ seniors. They've had a really hard time, and when they go to seniors' care homes, they feel like they have to go back into the closet. That's where I think these small homes are really essential. I had a graduate from LiftOff—it's a Black-led, business entrepreneurship think tank—and she said for her racialized folks, she'd like to have a smaller LTC where we have Afrocentric care, where seniors can get their hair done and age in dignity. We can do the same thing for the 2SLGBTQIA+ seniors, who want to be surrounded by those who understand their relationships and their families, and their needs, and their sexuality and gender identity.

Finally, though, I think what we need is all hands on deck. I appreciate this government's willingness to take a step, but we really need to go faster. We're taking baby steps where we need to start running. We see a silver tsunami—we hear the stats about double the folks facing

dementia by 2030—and I think we need to address that in all sectors.

For example, what I heard in committee was that we need to build the capacity of primary care to start working on prevention early on. The best way to treat dementia, from what we hear, isn't necessarily just the dementia-care sections. Yes, it helps when you have complex needs, but what we should really be doing is supporting those with an early diagnosis and getting recommendations on living a healthy active lifestyle, for example; by active transpiration; by also reducing the use of alcohol.

We need to start prioritizing, as MPPs here, the idea of prevention. Prevention is cheaper. It's more humane. It's more compassionate. So if we can build the capacity of primary care practitioners, people in community centres that deal with seniors and other professional groups, we would go a long way to ebbing this tsunami that we see coming our way.

I do appreciate that—I hope it will come to committee, so that we can have some of these—sometimes it's just one word that can mean all the different to a whole demographic of people living in Ontario: using words like “racialized”; using words like “2SLGBTQIA+”; using words like “folks who with disabilities.”

Finally, I think we need beds. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Questions for the member for Kitchener Centre?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the member from Kitchener Centre for the presentation and for your passion.

You talked about dementia. Dementia is on the rise. You know that, Madam Speaker. My mother had dementia for three years before she died two years ago, and it is a brutal disease. This bill really addresses dementia as one of the key components to do something. Dementia patient rate is increasing. There is no medication. There is no cure. It's going to cost billions and billions of dollars every 10 years to the Ontario health care system and Canadian health care system.

I ask the member: Could you agree with all these changes in this bill? Do you support this bill because there are a lot of changes coming through for dementia?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: Yes, I do support the bill. My only concern is, in mental health care, we did a disservice by only treating kind of the front line. We've moved into an eight-session brief therapy for mental health and we've taken away some of the complex treatment.

Here, I see us investing in the complex care of those in long-term-care beds—when they can get them; we know so many of those in our riding either want to stay at home and are lacking the home care or are on wait-list for long-term care. But if we only treat the most acute and we're not looking at prevention, we're never going to get ahead of this tidal wave.

So my hope is that taking the advice of experts and building up a fulsome framework of primary care practitioners who are trained in dementia—instead of waiting until the last three years of someone's life, we should be addressing how we know that symptoms can start 20 years

ahead of time, and so much can be done to turn that ship around before it gets to complexity.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member from Kitchener Centre for her comments this morning. I sat with the member during social policy for the clause-by-clause on the dementia care act, which we just did not too long ago. It's good to see some of that rolled in today, but these are amendments that New Democrats had put forward years ago that we're just seeing the government start to implement now.

0940

Can the member please maybe explain and remind the government of the amendment process that we had shared while doing the dementia care act? Because, as New Democrats, every single one of our amendments was ignored once again. How much further could we be, and what was your experience of the amendments that you brought forward to have the government listen to ideas outside of their own?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: So, on one hand I'm grateful that the idea wasn't lost. There's no monopoly on a good idea. So if we put forward amendments, it's great that they're turning into legislation, and so thank you for putting those amendments forward.

I want to be collaborative. We come with amendments that are not just pulled out of our back pocket; often they come from the Integrity Commissioner, the Auditor General, the Ontario Medical Association. Some of these things are small tweaks. We're not undermining the bill. We're not here to play games or push back on—yes, there are some times when we want to take away things that could cause harm or that we completely fundamentally disagree with.

But my experience with the dementia care bill, my experience with this, is that we're all on the same page, we all want to do what's best for Ontarians and we're bringing forward good-faith amendments that I think ought to be given consideration. If we only took a couple of more days to sit down with it, it would happen and it would make it better for all Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We don't have time for another back-and-forth question and answer, so we're going to move to further debate.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm pleased to be able to speak this morning to Bill 235. Some of my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly will know that I worked as a civil servant here at Queen's Park, both with the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat, the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Long-Term Care, so I bring that background to our debate today.

What's abundantly clear with this legislation is that it's going to continue to build on our government's support for seniors. As we plan for care and support needs of our seniors, we know that we can't deploy a one-size-fits-all approach. Not everyone requires the same level of support. Some need social supports to stay engaged and promote mental health and well-being. Others need caregivers to

help manage their medications and help with activities of daily living, like dressing, bathing and grooming, while others require increasingly complex around-the-clock medical and nursing care such as is provided in our long-term-care homes. These are our parents, our grandparents, our aunts, uncles, our families. These are the same people who built Ontario, who raised us, who contributed to our economy and our growth, and these are the same people who now rely on us for care, love and support. We owe them nothing less than the love and care they gave to us. Supporting our seniors wherever they choose to age is a core principle of this comprehensive plan before us.

Now, with Ontario's senior population growing so rapidly, we must act now; we must act today to ensure they lead healthy, independent and engaged lives for as long as possible while providing them with the care that they deserve, which is exactly what this proposed legislation and suite of initiatives and investments endeavour to do.

Now, Speaker, these proposed changes are part of a broader plan being implemented by the government to better support seniors and those who care for them by improving and expanding supports for seniors living in long-term care, retirement homes and the community. This is why this act makes targeted investments of \$114 million to various programs to address the needs of seniors and caregivers.

Because we know that seniors are not a one-size-fits-all group, we're taking a cross-government approach. With this legislation, we are uniting the efforts of the Ministries of Health, Long-Term Care, and Seniors and Accessibility to better serve seniors who are still living in their homes in the community, those living in retirement homes, as well as long-term-care residents.

This comprehensive legislation will amend acts and regulations, contains new investments and policy initiatives, all in an evidence-based approach that is built on the needs and priorities of Ontario seniors.

This legislation is comprised of three pillars: improving dementia care and supports; supporting seniors, their families and caregivers; and protecting seniors and enhancing social connections. The Support for Seniors and Caregivers Act, 2024, proposes legislative amendments to the Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021, and the Retirement Homes Act, 2010, that I did have a hand in developing many years ago when I was at the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat. I would like to now review these amendments, along with our related initiatives in each of the pillars.

The first pillar is improving dementia care and supports. Every single person in this Legislature and every single person watching today or listening either has a loved one suffering from dementia or Alzheimer's or knows someone who has a loved one. As many people know, a dementia diagnosis does not impact just one individual; it impacts the entire community, circle of friends and the family. For now, we must do everything we can to support people living with Alzheimer's and dementia and their families.

From awareness, prevention and diagnosis to treatment and care, our proposed legislation and related initiatives

aim to improve the care and supports that people living with dementia receive. This legislation, if passed, would amend the Fixing Long-Term Care Act and require all long-term-care homes to have an organized program for dementia care and services. This requirement would be similar in nature to other programs in long-term-care homes, such as palliative care.

This proposed amendment would build upon previous investments in dementia supports, such as Behavioural Supports Ontario services, as is currently in place in Fairview Lodge in Whitby, which provide person-centred, evidence-informed supports and services for older adults who have or are at risk for responsive behaviours associated with dementia, complex mental health, substance use and other neurological conditions. In fact, we just grew the base funding for this program by \$11 million this year to bring the annual funding total to \$95 million. This proposed amendment would help improve the quality of care for 60% of long-term-care residents living with dementia at Fairview Lodge.

To support this, our government plans to make targeted investments to develop a new program to train long-term-care staff in emotion-based models of care, which are designed to improve outcomes for residents living with dementia.

One model that comes to mind and that is in place at a couple of long-term-care homes in Whitby, particularly Fairview Lodge, is designing every door to a resident's room with a reminder of what they did before they came to the long-term-care home. If someone was a police officer, as an example, in their past life, we would actually paint the room to make it look like a police station, because seniors living with dementia, if they live in a room that does not respond to these needs, might wander. They might get lost. They might not know which room is actually theirs. By having these personalized experiences that trigger these positive memories, we're truly centring the care around the person. It humanizes the care residents receive at a time when empathy and compassion are needed the most.

That's not all that we're proposing. The Ministry of Long-Term Care will also work with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to incorporate additional dementia elements into personal support worker education standards. This is something I heard about a lot in my work as a civil servant here at Queen's Park, but I also hear about it as the MPP for Whitby. PSWs, when they graduate and start working in long-term care, might not necessarily be prepared for the realities of working with someone with dementia. By strengthening the standard, we're going to empower personal support workers, who work not only in long-term care but also in home care and in the community, to provide better supports for those living with dementia.

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Other steps that we're taking: We're continuing to support the Alzheimer Society of Ontario's First Link program and the Dementia Society of Ottawa and Renfrew County dementia coaches—crucially important programs

for dementia care. First Link and dementia coaches assist those newly diagnosed with Alzheimer's or dementia and their families with where to turn to for help in their need for help. First Link is a navigation program, where families who are newly diagnosed with dementia, or have loved ones newly diagnosed, can access supports and be linked to services. That is why it is extremely important that we're continuing in supporting that vital work.

The second pillar of our plan focuses on supporting seniors, their families and caregivers across the health care system. A number of initiatives fall under this pillar. This bill, if passed, would amend the Retirement Homes Act—specifically, the retirement home Residents' Bill of Rights—to reinforce residents' rights to ongoing support from caregivers, such as family members and friends who provide physical, mental, social and emotional support. It also aligns with amendments to the Fixing Long-Term Care Act to acknowledge the importance of caregivers in the health care sector. We know that caregivers do so much of the additional support and additional work that our loved ones and our residents require. By having this embedded in our legislation, we're celebrating the hundreds of thousands of hours of work that our caregivers provide.

For long-term-care homes, this proposed legislation includes measures to enhance recognition and respect for the diversity of residents. The expanded program would ensure residents are given reasonable opportunities to practise their religious and spiritual beliefs and to observe the requirements of those beliefs; and develop and implement initiatives that recognize the cultural diversity of residents and communities. These changes would result in improved recognition and respect for the experiences, histories, beliefs and needs of residents. We know that diversity is our strength, and we are celebrating that strength through these acts.

On top of the regulatory and legislative changes and amendments, several initiatives proposed under this pillar would complement the legislation. We're investing \$20 million in adult day programs, like the one that I announced at Community Care Durham with the Ministers of Health and Long-Term Care in Whitby last Monday, which offer social programming and peer connections, helping reduce social isolation and serve a range of seniors, including those with dementia.

We are also preparing to launch a pilot project: community access to long-term care. This pilot project would give seniors still living in their own homes access to certain services that are currently only available to those living in long-term care, such as recreational and social programming, dementia cafes, clinical services and all kinds of personal care. Instead of having long-term-care homes being closed and isolated away from the community, through this pilot project, we want to open up long-term-care homes, invite the community in and see the magic that can happen.

This legislation will also support the caregivers and families of people living with dementia through expanded access to respite services. Most caregivers are loved ones

with personal connections to those that they're looking after. As we know, respite services give those caregivers a well-deserved break, so that they can also take care of their health. So I am pleased that we are investing into respite services as part of this pillar.

This brings us to our last and final pillar, which focuses on protections and social connections for our seniors that will help reduce all forms of senior abuse and decrease social isolation, address staffing challenges to ensure consistent quality of care in long-term-care homes and support the prevention and management of infectious diseases in retirement homes.

Speaker, I often schedule information fairs in my riding, and I hear from the seniors that what I've just shared with the Legislative Assembly is critical to their overall well-being. Seniors are often considered the most vulnerable population and so, in addition to physical aging and cognitive decline, they may be isolated and lonely. They may be depressed. All of these factors can not only exacerbate medical conditions but, combined together, these factors put seniors at greater risk of becoming victims of crime or abuse, which is what our third pillar aims to address.

It seeks to protect seniors and enhance their social connections to improve their everyday lives, to ensure they are both physically and mentally healthy. One of the key programs in that is the Seniors Active Living Centres Program. We have two in Whitby. One is situated in the Brooklin Community Centre and Library, another in the seniors' centre in the middle of town, on Green Street.

Last year, our government expanded the number of seniors active living centres by 17, helping to address the geographic gaps and coverage from the existing network. This year, through the leadership of our Premier and the Minister of Finance and our Minister for Seniors and Accessibility, we're adding 100 more. We're changing lives for the better with this program. I'd like to congratulate the minister of long-term care and accessibility for his long-standing leadership in this area and making a difference in the lives of seniors in our province.

We know that social isolation is enemy number one for our seniors. When our seniors are isolated, their mental health suffers. They've told me that; they have told me that. Studies show that when our seniors are socially connected, they are less likely to need acute care help. The quality of their life is vastly improved. They are able to live their lives with the dignity and respect that they so deserve.

Our seniors' activity centres play a critical role as hubs for our seniors to stay healthy, active and connected in our community. They are places where seniors can have fun and strengthen existing and make new friendships. Now, under the previous government, for 15 years, they managed to build and supply fewer than 700 new spots. Let me repeat that: 700 new spots for care in the province of Ontario—none, absolutely none in the region of Durham, the fastest-growing region in the province of Ontario.

However, under the leadership of Premier Ford, our Minister for Seniors and Accessibility, our Minister of

Health, our Minister of Long-Term Care, since 2018, this government has embarked on a massive expansion of facilities in the province of Ontario, including the region of Durham. Literally as we speak, thousands of new spots are under construction, again, in the region of Durham and other parts of Ontario. With that construction, we're going to be able to provide excellent care and a home for people who need one in the province of Ontario.

I'm going to close by quoting a couple of leaders in our community related to seniors and long-term care. Donna Duncan, the executive director of the Ontario Long Term Care Association—she, along with Ruth McFarlane, who is the executive director of Durham Christian Homes Society in my riding and the past executive director, have done tremendous work in collaborating with the Ontario government but also residents in long-term-care homes across the province.

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“We thank the government for recognizing the important role long-term-care homes play in the continuum of care, allowing seniors to age in place in their communities when they can no longer stay in their family home. The changes announced will complement the government's historic investments in the sector and support the transformation that is under way in long-term-care homes across Ontario.”

Finally, Dr. Doris Grinspun, the leader of the registered nurses' association here in the province: “The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario welcomes a cross-government approach to enriching the quality of life and care for older persons whether they reside in long-term care homes, retirement homes, or their own homes. We applaud the investments to support seniors, their families and caregivers; enhance social connections; and improve dementia care. These, alongside a continuous focus on much-needed staff increases, will begin addressing a population that has been under-resourced for decades. We are delighted with the inclusion of nurse practitioners as clinical directors in long-term care homes—a role they successfully performed during the pandemic. Nurse practitioners bring advanced clinical education, the legal authority to diagnose and treat illnesses, and a deep understanding of policy and regulatory frameworks. This change will make a meaningful difference for residents of long-term care, their families and staff.”

A pleasure to speak to Bill 235, and I'm pleased to see all parties' support for the bill.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member opposite for his comments. One of the things I picked up on was the \$95 million in funding that he was talking about that was going with this. We don't see those actual dollars—it was an increase, but we don't see those in the bill. That \$95 million—I'm not really sure what that is going to tackle or what those dollars are supposed to be allocated for.

I can tell you, in my community, home care is a major issue. We have so many elderly seniors who are home,

taking care of their loved ones without the proper help and supports that they need. I'm sure that's happening right across the province. People come to me begging for help, to be able to help their wife or their husband or help them care for them. What we see in this bill is not going to address that issue, so could the member please indicate further if he knows more of what's happening in dementia care than the government has shared—

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

The member for Whitby to respond.

Mr. Lorne Coe: There were a number of questions that I heard in that, but I'm going to respond on dementia care.

The government is fully committed to improving dementia care in Ontario's long-term-care homes. The proposal that I just spoke to is a critical step in ensuring that every long-term-care home provides a thoughtful, proactive approach to dementia care. It's also just one of many steps our government is taking when it comes to enhancing supports for those living with dementia.

It's important to note that over 60% of long-term-care residents already live with dementia, and homes are already required to meet their needs, like the two long-term-care homes in the town of Whitby, whether it be Fairview Lodge or others there as well. The changes that are proposed will ensure that dementia care is standardized across the province by establishing minimum requirements, such as having written dementia programs using appropriate equipment and conducting annual evaluations based on evidence.

Importantly, Speaker, these changes do not simply add another layer of bureaucracy. They will improve care quality through clear, consistent standards—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We're out of time for the response.

Next question.

Mr. Billy Pang: As we all know, dementia continues to be a growing concern for families and communities across Ontario. This progressive condition profoundly impacts not only the individuals who are living with it, but also families, caregivers and loved ones who support them. People living with dementia and their caregivers face distinct and significant challenges, whether they are navigating resources within the broader community or ensuring appropriate care and support in long-term-care homes.

Our government recognized these challenges and has made a strong commitment to improving the lives of people affected by dementia through comprehensive support measures and innovative solutions. This includes ensuring access to tailored services and programs that enhance quality of life, preserve dignity and provide meaningful assistance to the families.

Can the member please provide further details on how the proposals outlined in this bill are designed to support seniors living with dementia and the broader community of—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. That's a very long question.

I'm going to go to the member for Whitby for the response.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker. Through you, thank you to the member for this important question.

I think what's clear, when I step back—and I've read the bill, and, yes, I spoke to it for 20 minutes—is that dementia care requires a coordinated and multi-faceted approach to ensure that people living with dementia and their caregivers receive the support they need. The proposed initiatives under the Support for Seniors and Caregivers Act's pillars are designed to work together to address these challenges holistically. We're focusing on supporting primary care providers with tools and resources to better diagnose and manage dementia, ensuring timely and effective care for individuals.

We're also providing funding for community-based programs that offer meaningful activities and respite services for caregivers, recognizing in the process the vital role these services play in maintaining quality of life and reducing caregiver burnout.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Whitby for your speech.

In my riding, we have numerous long-term-care homes that are closing or are at risk of closure. We just kept open Rose of Sharon. We lost Vermont Square. We lost Cedarvale, which is just north of our riding, and I'm very worried about St. George community care and the viability of that long-term-care home as well.

What is the government's plan to ensure that long-term-care homes can continue to operate in downtown Toronto, because we need to stop this rise of closures?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you to the member for the question.

What's clear—and I referred to some of the investments that we have already made in long-term care. I want to talk about those investments again because I think it's worthwhile focusing on those. The government has made thoughtful, strategic investments to address the real needs in long-term care, focusing on sustainability and meaningful improvements today. Whether it's the city of Toronto, whether it's the region of Durham, whether it's the city of Ottawa, that's the process that we consistently have taken.

It builds on the historic investments our government is making into long-term care, such as \$4.9 billion to hire and retain more staff and \$6.4 billion to continue to build Ontario's long-term-care capacity. We are building capacity across the province of Ontario, as I stand here today. And importantly, our approach is evidence-based—

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

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Whitby, that's time for the response. Thank you.

Next question?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you to the member from Whitby for his comments.

Madam Speaker, the government has made a clear and unwavering commitment to Ontario's elder population, and we will always stand by them and ensure their needs, rights and dignity are upheld. Retirement homes are more than just residences; they are communities and, for many, a place to build and maintain vital connections with family and friends.

With these proposed changes, can the member elaborate on how revisions to the retirement home Residents' Bill of Rights will reinforce residents' ability to access their loved ones? How will these changes ensure that residents' rights to meaningful social connections are protected while also balancing the operational considerations of retirement homes?

1010

Mr. Lorne Coe: When I was at the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat, I had a hand with a great group of civil servants led by Geoff Quirt, who was the assistant deputy minister at that time, and other policy leaders in developing the framework for the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority. Our proposal before the House today is to amend the regulatory authority's Residents' Bill of Rights to explicitly reinforce residents' rights to access family members and friends. What's really key here: This will directly address the loneliness epidemic that is impacting Ontario's seniors population today.

As I visit the retirement homes, and I've got seven in my riding, on a very regular basis, this is one of aspects I hear. Through initial consultations, stakeholders validated this approach, agreeing that such amendments would enhance resident health and well-being and build on existing practices without imposing significant additional costs on the retirement home operators. The bottom line—

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

The last question?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: In Thunder Bay, we actually don't have a problem with the abuse of the Trespass to Property Act because we have a police officer who's been trained in elder abuse, and when a care home has come to him and said, "Can we use the Trespass to Property Act?" he has said, "No."

So two things need to happen, and I would like to ask the member if he is willing to support these and educate the rest of his members of his party on this. One is that police officers need to be trained in the correct and incorrect uses of the TPA. And the second is that care homes—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We're out of time.

I'm going to go to the member for Whitby, and I'll ask for a quick response.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Well, it's going to be a quick response because we're debating Bill 235 today and improving the lives and quality of life of hard-working seniors that built our communities here in the province of Ontario, and we're getting it done.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

REPORT, FINANCIAL
ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Before we move to next business, I beg to inform the House that the following document was tabled: a report entitled Expenditure Monitor 2024-25: Q2, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MESSAGE DU TEMPS DES FÊTES

M. Stéphane Sarrazin: La période des Fêtes bat son plein, et je suis ravi de vous parler de plusieurs activités et défilés du père Noël qui ont rassemblé les gens des communautés de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell dans un véritable esprit des fêtes. Plusieurs défilés du père Noël ont eu lieu dans plusieurs villages : Alexandria, Casselman, Hawkesbury, Rockland, Russell, Lefaivre, St. Isidore, St-Albert, Vankleek Hill, et j'en passe sûrement. C'était toutes des défilés incroyables, qui ont rempli les rues de personnes joyeuses, qui ont rassemblé des familles enthousiastes. C'était tout aussi magique, avec de la musique, des lumières et bien sûr le père Noël lui-même qui répandait la joie auprès de tous les jeunes et les moins jeunes.

Ces défilés sont des célébrations qui démontrent la force et la fraternité de nos communautés et nous rappellent pourquoi nous faisons ce que nous faisons. L'énergie, la chaleur et le sentiment d'unité nous montre ce que signifie d'être Ontarien. Bien sûr, ce ne sera pas possible sans le travail acharné des organisateurs communautaires, des bénévoles et des participants qui consacrent leur temps et leur énergie à créer des expériences aussi mémorables.

Alors que nous célébrons la période des Fêtes, je souhaite à tous les Ontariens, spécialement les citoyens de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, un joyeux moment festif en famille, entre amis et, bien sûr, un peu de magie de Noël.

Joyeux Noël et joyeuses Fêtes à tous.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Doly Begum: We live in one of the best, richest countries and provinces in the world, yet Ontario's health care system is falling apart under this government—under consecutive Conservative and Liberal governments. In Scarborough Southwest alone, over 23,000 people—that's one in five residents—are without a family doctor. And across the province 2.5 million—just an estimate—lack primary care.

Access to primary care is not a luxury; it's a necessity. I have heard from constituents who were forced to go without life-saving mental health medications just because they can't get a doctor to renew a prescription. People are waiting in pain before they resort to the ER, only to be turned away because of resource shortages. Think of the

hours and hours when you have to take a loved one to the emergency and spend seven or eight hours. Think of the stress and frustration waiting more than a year for a surgery or not knowing where to turn to.

To meet the current needs just in Scarborough Southwest, we need at least 18 more family doctors. Yet in Ontario, we have the lowest per capita spending on health care in all of Canada, falling way behind all other provinces.

This is simply unacceptable. We cannot continue to stress our health care system beyond its limit—and that's exactly what's happening under this government—hoping it will hold together. People in Scarborough Southwest and across this province deserve a government that is going to prioritize investing in our health care system. That will ensure that everyone has access to the care they need and deserve.

ALGOMA UNIVERSITY

Mr. Ross Romano: Today I rise with immense pride to celebrate the latest achievements of Algoma University in my hometown of Sault Ste. Marie. Recently, the university inaugurated two transformative facilities: the newly renovated animal care facility and the state-of-the-art containment level 2 laboratory. These groundbreaking spaces mark a new chapter for Algoma University, demonstrating its steadfast commitment to research excellence and student success.

The containment level 2 laboratory, designed to meet global biosafety standards, will empower researchers and students to explore advanced studies in health sciences, biology and environmental science—areas of critical importance for our future.

Complementing this is the animal care facility, which supports responsible research using small animals and aquatic models. This renovated space ensures that our students and researchers gain hands-on experience while adhering to the highest standards of ethical animal care.

This is what can be achieved when investment meets innovation. These facilities strengthen Sault Ste. Marie's position as a hub for research, academic excellence and economic growth. In fact, Algoma University's impact on our local economy is profound, contributing over \$145 million yearly in added income and supporting more than 1,600 jobs alone last year.

I'm very proud of the role our government has played in making these facilities a reality. To the researchers, students and faculty of Algoma University, congratulations on this remarkable milestone. You inspire us all with your passion and your commitment to shape a better tomorrow. Thank you again for making Sault Ste. Marie proud.

ALLISSYA AND SUHAVA GILL

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Today I'm honoured to recognize an extraordinary initiative led by two compassionate sisters from Brampton, Suhava Gill, aged 10, and Allissya

Gill, aged 12, students at Newton's Grove School. They are also joined by their principal, Cheri Grogan; teacher Crystel Figaro; father, Pardeep Singh Gill; and grandfather Mr. Gurdev Singh Gill. This holiday season, they're launching Bites of Kindness, a heartfelt campaign to support the homeless in our community by preparing and distributing over 500 care packages filled with food and other essential items to those in need.

Wanting to have as large an impact as possible, they were able to get their entire school on board to make sandwiches for the less privileged. Their efforts are truly heartwarming and inspiring and aim to bring warmth and hope to some of the most vulnerable members of society during this special time of year.

Their determination to make a difference reflects the values instilled in them by their family. Their grandfather Mr. Gurdev Singh Gill, a dedicated advocate for charitable work, has been a lifelong inspiration in giving back to those in need. Their father, as chair of the William Osler Health System board, has also been a driving force in ensuring the well-being of others.

Together, these young girls embody the power of youth leadership and the importance of family values in creating positive change. On behalf of this Legislature, I commend them for their efforts and wish them success in this incredible initiative.

1020

ARTS AND CULTURE

MPP Jill Andrew: I am proud to read a poem written by one of my community members, an award-winning singer-songwriter, voice teacher, poet and advocate for seniors and the arts. Her name is Honey Novick, and she's a lover of all things Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen, amongst other things.

An Ode to the Cultural Worker

For you who value the Cultural Worker, this is for you.
Cultural workers devote, and most often donate,
Their skills, products, talent, service, time,
Labour and space.

They document history and the continuity of society.

They ponder, ruminates, question, provoke, create, and build,

Then offer these gifts, so that all humanity
Can benefit by their philosophy of possibility.

Are colours important, an image succinct?
What people see and how societies behave,
Very often are linked.

Do you care if a schoolchild learns rhythm or team play?
Can you count to 10 and then count backwards again?

Hickory, dickory, dock.

Do you relate to life by punching a clock?

A job well done is a person fulfilled,
So who cares if cultural enrichment is instilled?

Culture is born of ideas: hit or miss.

Culture is born by people's sweat,

We can't fake it or take it for granted.

We must take it in stride.

We must take it with pride.

The Cultural Worker, visible or not, is always somewhere by your side.

Honey is here today. Can we give her a round of applause and a standing ovation?

Applause.

MICHAEL G. SOLCZ

Mr. Andrew Dowie: This week, our Windsor-Essex community mourns the passing of Michael G. Solcz. Michael was born in 1931 in Hunta, and his family relocated to Windsor in 1942. In 1959, Mike founded the Valiant Corp. He grew it to 800 employees in Windsor with 27 facilities in 15 countries and more than 1,500 workers worldwide.

Mike was known for his harmony and his loyalty to others, his warm smile and his kindness. You'd be remiss to find someone who would not associate Mike with philanthropy. The Solcz Family Foundation has awarded \$7.8 million to over 50 charities in our community, \$1 million to the youth wellness hub and \$15 million towards new pediatric facilities at the future Windsor-Essex regional acute care hospital.

Mike accomplished so, so much along the way. He was the first named executive in residence at St. Clair College centre of excellence in manufacturing; the Yves Landry Award of Excellence; the EY Entrepreneur of the Year Award at age 84; the key to the city of Windsor; and a doctor of laws from the University of Windsor where he noted to students, "Continue to be curious about the world around you. Be confident in who you are. Believe that you can make a difference in the world and make the choice to do so."

Mike Solcz's legacy will stand the test of time, and Windsor-Essex is truly better for him being part of our community. We will remember you, Mike. Thank you.

MEMBER FOR OTTAWA CENTRE

Mr. Joel Harden: For six and a half years, Speaker, it's been an honour to serve the people of Ottawa Centre in this House. It's been the privilege of my life to work for them, to advocate with them and to occupy their seat in this chamber.

As members of this House may know, I have decided not to run again in the next provincial election. I'm seeking the NDP nomination for the next federal election, and I hope to serve our community and our country there, but we shall see.

So, this morning it is farewell—not goodbye; not goodbye because I'm sure we're going to meet again. Those devoted to public service, we have a habit of finding each other, so let's keep in touch. This isn't a sad moment.

In fact, Speaker, as befitting the season, this morning, I bring you tidings of comfort and joy. Catherine McKenney,

who served Ottawa's Somerset ward as a city councillor with distinction for nine years, is going to be running for this seat in Ottawa Centre. That is good news. That is good news for Ottawa Centre and good news for Ontario. I look forward, if Ottawa Centre agrees, to Catherine having the opportunity to work with this caucus and work with the members of this House.

As I rise here this morning, I feel a deep sense of gratitude for those who have supported me in this role for six and a half years, beginning, of course, with my family. Clare, Adele and Emery, I love you all a lot. My staff colleagues over the years in Ottawa Centre: Samiha, Peyton, Bruce, William, Kieran, Ty, Erica, Ethan, Sharon, Sashika and all the community volunteers we've interacted with—you're all brilliant.

The organizing community at home—it's too big of a list to name for a five-minute speech, Speaker, but the organizing community at home, in my party and beyond, you inspire me every single day to stand up at this place and demand more from our political system. I feel the same way about all the people in public service who are maintaining our institutions with dignity and pride.

Colleagues in the NDP caucus, what can I say except thank you. Thank you for your support and your tolerance and your patience with me.

Thank you to all the staff in this House, Speaker. All the people who the viewers at home don't see, who keep the lights on and cook the food, who make sure we're safe, who clean our offices—mine being perhaps the worst offender sometimes—thank you. Thank you for all the work you've done.

Speaker, in the remaining time I have left—a couple of minutes—I do want to reflect on something I think is important, that's on my mind as my service here ends. It's an insight that's been brought to me from the current councillor for Somerset ward back home in Ottawa, Ariel Troster. Ariel once said, in a very pitched community debate back home, that we have to resist the urge to give up on each other. I've not been able to forget that ever since Ariel offered those words.

And why do I think that? I think that because I believe we are living in a time when it is easy to dehumanize each other. At the click of a button, we can consign someone to a category or opinion that we deem to be worthless and, I think, do serious damage to our democracy. The way in which many of us in this chamber and many of our neighbours at home get their information, the way that information is conveyed is mediated—mediated through algorithms that I do not believe build our country, build our province or build our communities. They are built to divide us against each other, to pit us against each other, and I think we have to resist that in this House. We can't give up on each other.

I have been blessed to work with people at home who, every single day, in a school or in a hospital or in our streets, are coming to Ottawa from places all around the world. They've survived unimaginable conditions of violence and war and conflict, and what they tell me is very simple: Hate is easy; love is hard. Love takes work.

Compassion takes work. And that's the message I take from Councillor Troster today.

I will segue to this insight, Speaker, as I end. I see Pastor Charlie in the gallery. Hello and thank you for your service to this House too. I'm reminded of Reverend Lewis Smedes, a Christian theologian who means a lot to me. When I think about how we champion love and compassion and kindness, I think about what Reverend Smedes said when he said, "To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you."

When I think about Reverend Smedes's words, I think about the member for Hamilton Centre. I think about the fact that that member has been coming into this House during one of the most difficult times for our world, for the last 13 months. Families torn apart by violence—we're grieving and suffering every single day, and the member has not been allowed to speak because we have a motion of censure for her. What I want to encourage the member of this House to consider: At this time of year, remember to hold forth in this place and to speak the truth she knows to be true.

I hope the members of this government will find time before this session ends to lift that motion and to enter in dialogue with the member of Hamilton Centre and to come to an understanding where we see each other through that prism of forgiveness that I've tried to convey this morning.

1030

Speaker, to you all so personally, thank you for your support. Thank you, all the members of this House. I salute your public service. Let's do everything we can to make this place the wonderful place that it is.

Applause.

BOB RAINBOTH

DENIS GRATTON

Mr. Stephen Blais: As all of us, I'm sure, have been occupied the last number of weeks with Christmas and holiday events in our ridings—the pancake breakfasts, the church bazaars, the Santa Claus parades—I wanted to take a moment to thank someone in Orléans who has been instrumental in organizing the Orléans Santa Claus parade, otherwise known as the Orléans Parade of Lights.

This is one of the largest Santa Claus and Christmas parades in the province. Tens of thousands of people line Saint Joseph Boulevard. They brave what is often in Ottawa a very cold Saturday evening to see Santa Claus come by and to see all of the organizations decorate their floats with lights and singers and volunteers hand out candy.

To Bob Rainboth, who is a firefighter in the city of Ottawa—he also serves as a school trustee on the French Catholic school board. Bob has helped to organize and led the way on the Parade of Lights in Orléans for 27 years. This was his last Parade of Lights, and Bob, I just want to say, thank you very much for everything you've done for our community.

Maintenant, monsieur le Président, quelque chose d'un petit peu plus triste : Denis Gratton était journaliste et chroniqueur franco-ontarien avec *Le Droit* depuis 1991. Denis était un très fier Franco-Ontarien. Il a toujours pris l'occasion de parler fièrement de sa communauté et a toujours accordé une grande importance aux affaires francophones. Il a promu la francophonie et lutté pour les droits des francophones, principalement leurs droits linguistiques. Il a toujours défendu la langue française en Ontario. Denis a couvert la fermeture de l'Hôpital Montfort en février 1997 et a fait tout pour l'avancement de SOS Monfort.

Samedi dernier, nous avons perdu une légende. Notre cher Denis est décédé à son domicile d'un cancer. Il est mort trop tôt, n'ayant seulement 64 ans. Je voudrais offrir mes sincères condoléances à la famille de Denis et à chaque personne qui ressent cette grande perte.

HOLIDAY EVENTS IN FLAMBOROUGH–GLANBROOK

Ms. Donna Skelly: As we know, the holiday season is upon us and today I'm rising to discuss some of the wonderful events across my riding of Flamborough–Glanbrook which are getting us all into the holiday spirit.

Just last month, the community of Waterdown held a number of holiday events including the annual Breakfast with Santa Claus that took place at the Waterdown Legion, where proceeds go to the many food-insecure children in our community. Of course, this is supported by the Rotary clubs of Flamborough AM and Food4Kids Waterdown.

Also in Waterdown was the annual Santa Claus parade which took place in the downtown core. It was great to see so many residents—in fact, about thousands of people—enjoying the festivities. A big thank you to the army of volunteers who worked tirelessly to make it such an incredible event.

This coming weekend, December 14, at 2 o'clock, I'll be in Binbrook for the annual Santa Claus parade, and I encourage everyone to come out and join us in celebrating this wonderful season. These events are what make the holiday season so special in our community.

This is our last week in the Legislature before we break for the holidays, so I would like to wish everyone at Queen's Park and across Ontario a merry Christmas and a safe and happy holiday season.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Last week, we recognized the 35th anniversary since that fateful day on December 6, 1989, when an armed man entered l'École Polytechnique in Montreal and murdered 14 innocent women and wounded several others before turning the gun on himself. As my colleague the Honourable Charmaine Williams has said in our Legislature, "His savagery changed Canada. On that day, he stole lives, dreams, aspirations, and our shared innocence as a nation. The aftershock still rever-

berates across our country; every woman remembers. Indeed, how could we forget?"

Since then, December 6 serves as the national day of remembrance on violence against women. In my community of Oakville North–Burlington, I joined a solemn event hosted by Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Services, SAVIS of Halton. SAVIS, which has served the Halton community for over 25 years, offers free and confidential, 24/7, one-on-one crisis counselling services. And with one woman or girl killed every 48 hours, their services are sorely needed.

Our government has zero tolerance for gender-based violence in all its forms. Everyone has the right to live in safety and with dignity, free from the threat of violence. As we reflect on that dark day and remember the victims and their families, we do so in the spirit of hope and with the shared conviction that we must continue the important work and put an end, once and for all, to intimate partner violence and gender-based violence.

HOUSE SITTINGS

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I'd just like to advise the House that the night sitting for this evening has been cancelled.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We'll do the best we can. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Le Président (L'hon. Ted Arnott): Dans la tribune du Président ce matin sont les stagiaires de la Fondation Jean-Charles-Bonenfant : Éliée Plourde, Arnaud Dufour, Clovis Brochu, Juliette Beaulieu-Lavoie et Vincent Roy. They are joined by their OLIP counterparts, Megan Ryan-Lloyd and Nika Lennox. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

Also, in the gallery today, we have a special guest: Lila Bharda, who is the wife of LPS Constable Bharda. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to express a message of gratitude to King township's fire chief, Jim Wall, who's with us today, as well as his wonderful wife, Krista. Chief Wall has served the people of King township for nearly 40 years as a dedicated firefighter, as a chief, as a leader, as a man who left a legacy in our province.

Chief, I am eternally grateful to you. We are all grateful to you for your duty and sacrifice, and we honour you ahead of your retirement. We may be a bit jealous of your timing, but we wish you our very best. On behalf of the member from York–Simcoe and on behalf of all of Ontarians, thank you so very much for your service to the people of Canada.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It's my honour to introduce Graham Henderson, CEO of the London Chamber of Commerce. Graham is also the former president of Music Canada and also spent time at Universal Music Canada. In

his spare time, Graham taught at U of T's faculty of law and Osgoode Hall Law School of York University.

Graham is here today to support my employee ownership motion. I want to welcome you to Queen's Park, my friend.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: I have the privilege of welcoming to the Legislature today a fellow parliamentarian from the great province of Alberta, Dan Williams, the MLA for Peace River and the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction for the province of Alberta. Welcome to Queen's Park.

1040

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I want to welcome the following members of our tourism sector and the TIAO to Queen's Park today. Thank you for such a fruitful meeting this morning about the needs of our tourism sector across Ontario. I want to welcome Andrew Siegwart, Tourism Industry Association of Ontario; Damian Goulbourne, Centennial College; Rebecca Mackenzie, Culinary Tourism Alliance; Stephen Tooshkenig, Indigenous Tourism Ontario; Michael Crockatt, Ottawa Tourism; and Andrew Weir, Destination Toronto. Welcome to Queen's Park and thank you for coming today.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I'd like to welcome Michael Crockatt and the team at Ottawa Tourism to the Legislature today. Whether it's the historic Rideau Canal or the World Junior Hockey Championship, there are lots of reasons to visit the nation's capital this winter. You're all welcome. Visit ottawatourism.ca.

Hon. Rob Flack: I would like to welcome the Grain Farmers of Ontario today. I think everybody is going to enjoy the reception tonight at the legislative dining room at 4:30. In particular, I believe Jeff Harrison is on his way, and Crosby Devitt, the CEO. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I just want to again recognize my dear friend Charlie the chaplain, Charlie Lyons, who's here in the chamber. He's moving on to greener pastures. He's a dear friend to many here and I know he's going to be making many more friendships and helping so many in the future ahead for him. Thank you, Charlie.

Mr. Rick Byers: Colleagues, it's my pleasure to welcome this morning students from North Toronto Collegiate Institute—the grade 10 history class, who will be here shortly. I saw them in the building. I'd like to welcome all students, but in particular, for one student, a special welcome: Welcome to my niece Libby Byers. Welcome, Libby, and all the students from North Toronto Collegiate Institute.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: It's with great honour that I would like to introduce and welcome the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario. I had a wonderful meeting with some of their members, talking about the importance that small business plays in the economy. I would like to welcome Dionne Bishop, who is the owner-operator of Events by Dionne; Rebecca Cabral, who operates and supports Camping in Ontario; Gavin Sibley, City Sightseeing Toronto—you've all seen his double-decker buses around the city—and Aaron Binder, CEO

and operator of Go Tours Canada. Thank you very much, and welcome to your House.

Hon. Stan Cho: TIAO is in the House. A few names were missed, so I want to mention them now: Gregory Elmhirst, Madison Simmons, Neil Pakey, Rebecca Mackenzie, Krista LeClair, Colin Morrison, the rocket Michael Crockatt and, of course, Andrew Siegwart. Welcome to Queen's Park.

MPP Jill Andrew: I want to welcome once again Honey Novick to the House, a wonderful community member and friend in Toronto—St. Paul's. Thank you for your artistry and your advocacy.

I'd also like to thank Charlie the chaplain for years of service and support and, frankly, for your heart. We really appreciate it, and I will certainly miss you.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): With the indulgence of the House, I'd like to continue with the introduction of visitors. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I'm so pleased to welcome to the House partners from the Student Nutrition Ontario program: Peter Kendall, Laura Arrell, Judith Barry, Catherine Parsonage, Shaun McKenna and Debbie Field. Mr. Speaker, these individuals played a critical role in helping raise over \$7 million through the Healthy Students Brighter Ontario campaign, in addition to the province's \$5 million contribution. Thank you so much for everything you do for the students in the province, and I look forward to meeting you after question period.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I'm happy to introduce Vimalan Balasubramaniam, a networking engineer, and Vijeyaletchumy Charde Singgaran, a professor at Seneca College. They are the grandchildren of the late K.M. Chellappah, a Sri Lankan philanthropist and pioneer of the free library movement who founded the renowned Jaffna library. They carry forward their family legacy right here in Ontario and Canada.

Thank you for your service. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I want to take an opportunity to introduce the board chair of William Osler, Pardeep Gill, who's here with us today with his two beautiful daughters, who have been supporting those in need and who were honoured with a members' statement earlier today; and also Gurdev Gill, a long-time community advocate in the city of Brampton and across the province.

Welcome to the Legislature.

Ms. Patrice Barnes: I'd like to welcome Eleanor McIntosh, a friend, a mentor and a trailblazer in the advocacy for Black student success—such a pleasure. Thank you for being here.

Mr. John Jordan: I'd like to introduce my great assistant, Joseph Ward, his brother Gregory Ward, who is also the assistant for the member for Ajax, and most importantly, I want to introduce their mother, Catherine Ward.

Mr. Dave Smith: They are in security right now, on their way up, but I'd like to welcome air cadet squadron 700 from Etobicoke today.

Mrs. Robin Martin: It's my great pleasure to introduce my executive assistant from my constituency office, Demetri Makrigiorgos.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's my pleasure today to introduce to the Legislature some good friends of ours here at Queen's Park from Ontario One Call: Jim Keech, the president and CEO; Jean Lépine; and the chairman of Ontario One Call, Mitch Panciuk.

Hon. Kinga Surma: It's a very special day today for one of our sitting members. It's the MPP for Huron-Bruce's birthday today. She's also the Minister of Rural Affairs. Happy birthday!

Mr. Matthew Rae: I want to introduce Nika Lennox, who is my OLIP intern, and Meredith Forget, director of economic development and tourism from the great county of Perth.

Hon. Nina Tangri: I'm sure, each day, he diligently watches question period. I would like to wish my grandson Raj a very happy first birthday.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I'd like to wish a very warm welcome to the students from St. Joseph's high school in East Riverside, from my riding. Welcome to Queen's Park today. I'm looking forward to joining you after question period.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the principal of Newton's Grove School, Cheri Grogan, and her associate Crystel Figaro. We're also joined by Allissya Gill and Suhava Gill, who have launched the campaign Bites of Kindness to support the homeless in our community. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I want to introduce a member of the Ontario Zoroastrian Community Foundation, Phil Sidhwa. They're in the process of building a one-of-a-kind Zoroastrian temple in North America.

Phil, thank you to you and the team for everything that you do. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: I apologize, but I forgot to introduce Paul Di Ianni from the town of Lincoln, and Britnie—whose last name I will butcher, but welcome back to Queen's Park.

1050

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I would like to introduce a friend and constituent, a former member of Parliament for Newmarket-Aurora, Lois Brown—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Introduction of visitors? No, sorry; the member for Newmarket-Aurora has more.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Sorry; I wasn't finished, Speaker. She's actually here today in her capacity as the CEO of Health Partners International Canada. They are having a reception today at lunchtime, and you're all invited, in room 228. Thank you.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I would like to congratulate Laura Yahlou as the page captain today. I look forward to taking a photo with her at the grand staircase and having her for lunch tomorrow. Most of all, I welcome her to our office in Richmond Hill after the holidays.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I've been asked by the member for Nepean to introduce her friend Heather Tessier, who is here with us today as well. Welcome to Queen's Park.

That concludes our introduction of visitors for this morning.

QUESTION PERIOD

HOUSING

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Speaker. This question is for the Premier.

Housing starts are down, housing targets are out of reach and housing prices—boy, it gets worse every single day. The Premier talks about housing, but is pandering to wealthy developers, insiders and speculators while people are about to lose their homes. It's been the same story for over six years now.

As I go out there and I meet with folks in the construction industry—carpenters, tradespeople, home builders, electricians—they're training people, they're ready to build the housing that we need, but workers are actually getting laid off right now and projects are getting stalled.

So something's got to give. My question to the Premier is: Why won't the Premier support home builders and workers who are ready to build and act on this housing crisis?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Of course, we are and we have been since 2018 now—as you know, we have been unravelling the mess that was left behind by the previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP. They put regulations in place that made it almost impossible to get shovels in the ground in the province of Ontario. As we've unravelled and reduced the costs of building, we have seen in certain segments—purpose-built rentals, for instance, are at their highest levels in almost recorded history in the province of Ontario. We're happy about that.

But indeed, on the single-detached-home front, there has been a slowdown on that, predominantly because of the higher interest rates which were caused, of course, by the inflationary policies of the federal Liberal and NDP coalition in Ottawa, which saw interest rates increase at the fastest rate in the history of this country. Despite that, we're going to continue to double down and eliminate the red tape that is getting in the way of getting more homes built, and we will get 1.5 million homes built—

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

Supplementary question?

Ms. Marit Stiles: The truth is that Ontario is in last place in the country when it comes to building housing. It is the single biggest cost that's facing families in Ontario today. Housing starts are collapsing to the lowest levels that they've been since 1955. More people are losing their homes every single day.

The Premier, meanwhile, is running scared, saying no to legalizing fourplexes or building housing near transit. When is this Premier going to find the courage to take on the housing crisis and say yes to building more homes?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I hear the opposition talk about this all the time: legalizing fourplexes. Well, 80% of the province of Ontario has legalized fourplexes. The city of Toronto has legalized fourplexes; the city of Guelph has legalized fourplexes. You know who aren't building fourplexes? The city of Toronto, in that 80% of the province where it is actually legal. Because they believe—classic NDP, supported by the Liberals—that as long as you talk about something, poof, magically it's going to appear.

But you know what will actually get homes built? Infrastructure in the ground that helps you build homes and brings the cost down. That's why we're building over \$3 billion worth of infrastructure, so that we can get more homes built.

You know what else? By removing taxes and reducing the cost—they voted against the reduction of taxes. You know what happened when we cut taxes? More purpose-built rentals were built in the province of Ontario than at any other time in the history of this province.

We're going to double down, do more and get more homes built for the people of—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Again, Ontario is in the last place in Canada. BC, Manitoba, every other province is building more homes faster than this government is doing it.

If this Premier won't build homes, he should get out of the way and let New Democrats build them. That's who's building homes in Ontario and Canada.

We have a plan; it's called Homes Ontario. It is the largest home building program that this province has ever seen. It's going to double the supply of permanently affordable homes in Ontario. When we forced a vote on that, the government and this Premier said—guess what? They said no.

Speaker, what is it going to take for this Premier to drop his vanity projects and get to work actually building the homes that Ontarians need?

Interjections.

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

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: For our colleagues, just for a moment, imagine, if you would: You want to have a new home built, and there shows the NDP caucus with their tool belts on. They show up and they're going to build you homes. Can you imagine the types of homes that the NDP caucus would build for the people of the province of Ontario? I can, because they tried this once before under Bob Rae, and he almost bankrupted the province of Ontario.

They talk about what we voted against. They brought forward a policy that would cost over \$200 billion to build next to nothing, because what they really like to build are bureaucracies. They love to build bureaucracies because

like the Liberals, it's not about actually accomplishing anything. It's about pretending. They're about pretending; we're about delivering.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Ms. Marit Stiles: It's about priorities, and this government has all the wrong ones. We've got a Premier who is focused on ripping up bike lanes, and one million Ontarians are lined up at food banks. We have got a Premier who's mired in an RCMP criminal investigation while unemployment is at its worst in over a decade. He is wasting \$2.2 billion on a luxury spa in downtown Toronto while two and a half million Ontarians don't have a family doctor.

Life is getting harder for Ontarians. When is this Premier going to cancel his vanity projects and start focusing on them?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, I don't know where the Leader of the Opposition has been. I'll tell you what's happening right now. The Leader of the Opposition has finally come to the realization that 800,000 people came to the province of Ontario. Why? For the hope and opportunity that exists because of the policies of this government.

The Leader of the Opposition, supported by the Liberals, had voted against building more transit and transportation networks in the province of Ontario. They voted against every single policy that we have brought forward to get more shovels built quicker. They voted against hospitals in their own communities. They voted against long-term-care homes that were being built in their communities. They voted against schools that are being built, investments in colleges, in universities. They have voted against incredible investments of over \$70 billion, which has led to over 800,000 jobs and 800,000 people with the dignity of a job that didn't before. And they're in a panic because we're getting the job done.

1100

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, you've got to wonder when this Premier is going to get up and have the guts to take responsibility for his own failures.

Yesterday, I was amazed to hear the Premier complaining that congestion is now costing Ontario \$56 billion a year. You know what? That's on him. That is his government's legacy: a Premier so distracted by schemes and scandals and making money for his insider friends—a luxury spa, rerouting a highway for his friends, selling off our health care system—while folks are stuck on the 401 and showing up at closed emergency rooms.

The Premier has been on the job for six years. When is he going to have the guts to stand up and answer for his failures?

Interjections.

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

I'm going to caution the Leader of the Opposition: Personal insults add nothing to the debate.

The Premier may reply.

Hon. Doug Ford: Well, Mr. Speaker, just to respond to the Leader of the Opposition, when they were in power with the Liberals, they propped them up for 15 years while they destroyed our province. They didn't have to worry about traffic because no one was going to their jobs. There were over 300,000 people—do you know where the traffic was? It was all heading to the southern border, with 300,000. All we saw was their tail lights. Now there's over 850,000 people working today that weren't working when they were in power.

We're building transit, the largest transit project in North America. We're setting records when we're building hospitals—\$50 billion of hospitals that they voted against. When we pass bills to accelerate building homes, guess what? They voted against it. They voted against the \$3 billion of infrastructure. God forbid, they all had their own little province; it would be bankrupt. There would be no jobs—

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

The final supplementary.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, 8.8% unemployment—the highest unemployment in a decade under this Premier and this government. After six long years of this Premier, Ontarians are asking: “Is my life any better?” They're stuck waiting for homes, for doctors, for better schools, for an easier and more affordable life.

And what has this government delivered instead? A greenbelt scandal; a Premier under RCMP criminal investigation; \$400 from every household in this province for his vanity luxury spa in downtown Toronto; cash-for-access scandals; one million Ontarians lined up at food banks; encampments in every corner in every community in this province.

This is this Premier's legacy. Don't Ontarians deserve better than that?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats. The government side will come to order. The official opposition will come to order.

Premier?

Hon. Doug Ford: Well, let's just remind the Leader of the Opposition that there's 800,000 people that came to our province for a better life, for a better job, a bigger paycheque, and we fulfilled that; over 200,000 new jobs alone this year. We had 136 companies from around the world come here and invest over \$11 billion and create 12,200 jobs—in total, over \$70 billion of investment from around the world coming to Ontario.

We are the envy of North America. We're the envy of the world. You just have to ask the great governors that I speak to on a weekly basis, the senators, and congressmen and women. They see the growth here, and we're their number one competition. You wonder why President-elect

Trump wants to put tariffs? Because we're a threat to the US, because we're a manufacturing powerhouse. We created more manufacturing jobs last year than all 50—

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

Next question?

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday, the Minister of Infrastructure was keen on quoting the Auditor General, and so I pulled some quotes of my own about the Ontario Place deal. She says, “Over the duration of the 95-year lease ... the present value ... of the rent payments is only about \$163 million.”

The Auditor General said, “We found that the social and environmental benefits and costs of redevelopment were not factored into the assessment framework or considered in the redevelopment.” When discussing Therme's proof of concept, the Auditor General said, “We found that IO did not conduct due diligence to ensure that spas cited by Therme in its submission were in fact owned and operated by Therme.... We reviewed the six spas and found five instances where the spa cited ... was not owned or operated by Therme.” It's quite something that this infrastructure minister signed this deal.

To the minister: Will she cancel the Therme deal now, or will Ontario Place join Highway 407 as one of the worst deals in the history of this province?

Interjections.

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

To reply, the Minister of Infrastructure.

Hon. Kinga Surma: I will not, Mr. Speaker. Again, as I mentioned yesterday, Therme met the financial test that was set by Infrastructure Ontario, and that information was released on October 3. The lease was released, Mr. Speaker.

As per any questions involving environmental assessment or mitigation, I'll reference page 79: For “the Ontario Place redevelopment, two environmental assessments were completed. A category B environmental assessment related to site servicing was conducted in July 2022 and a category C ... was completed in November 2023 related to the public realm,” the science centre “and its associated parking options....

“Similar to the category B environmental assessment, the category C environmental assessment also noted mitigation measures.... The TRCA also reviewed and provided input.... The province will continue to work with the TRCA throughout the design and development stages related to the site servicing and the public realm.”

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Speaker, the Auditor General's report suggested this is one of the worst deals in Ontario's history, and the people of the province are paying the price. When discussing the financial viability of the Therme project, she says, “We found that financial concerns about Therme Group ... identified by a senior adviser

at” Infrastructure Ontario “were not addressed prior to executing the lease.”

“Therme Group’s equity value prior to December 31, 2019, appeared low, at less than one million euros.” I don’t know how this deal ever happened, Speaker.

She said the bid assessment process was “irregular, subjective and not always followed.” She said, “Some participants had access to the” Infrastructure Ontario vice-president “while others did not; this is in contravention of the” call for development’s “stated process that said ‘No communication with government staff ... is permitted during the ... process.’”

Speaker, to the minister: Will you take accountability for this dirty deal and resign?

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

The Minister of Infrastructure.

Hon. Kinga Surma: I will not, and I will not be going anywhere. The AG was very clear in her report that this was a real estate solicitation. Michael Lindsay, the CEO of Infrastructure Ontario, was very clear in his statements after the AG report that this was an exercise to gather ideas from the globe.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP were very clear yesterday: Under their leadership, nothing would happen at the waterfront and nothing would be built. Yesterday, they admitted that they wouldn’t even invest in public park space and public realm space at Ontario Place. Thank goodness it’s this government that is in leadership. Thank goodness, thanks to this Premier, we will have an attractive, exciting Ontario Place that families can enjoy, and thank goodness that under this Premier, we will be building infrastructure in the province of Ontario that the NDP—

Interjections.

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

The member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas, come to order. The member for Sudbury, come to order. The member for Hamilton Mountain, come to order. The member for Ottawa Centre will come to order. The member for Waterloo will come to order.

The next question.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Speaker, actually, this morning reminds me why my riding traded an NDP member for a PC member.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Okay, the member will take his seat. That’s not helping.

I recognize the member for Windsor–Tecumseh.

1110

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Speaker, constituents in my riding of Windsor–Tecumseh have repeated concerns to me about the protectionist rhetoric coming out of the U.S. They’re worried about what tariffs might mean for their jobs and for businesses in our communities. They want to know that above all they have a government that will stand up for them and for the interests of Ontario workers and businesses. Unfortunately, when they look to the federal

Liberal government, they see in them a government where anti-business ideology is reflected in all of their policy decisions. So, unlike the Liberals, workers and business can be certain that under the leadership of our Premier, our government will never turn our backs on them.

Speaker, can the minister please share with this House what our government is doing to maintain and strengthen Ontario–U.S. relations?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, we just returned from Washington where we continued to drive home the message that when Ontario and U.S. work together, both of our economies succeed. Ontario does a half a trillion dollars in two-way trade with the U.S. every year, but unlike Mexico and China, our trade is balanced: \$250 billion in, \$250 billion out. And, Speaker, we are the top export destination for 17 U.S. states and the number two destination for 11 more.

Ontario has everything the U.S. needs to succeed, including a wealth of critical minerals that are used in batteries, semi-conductors: all the things they want to manufacture at home.

Our message to the U.S. is clear: We don’t make products for the U.S.; we make products with the United States.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you, Minister. Businesses and workers in Windsor–Tecumseh remember all too well the previous Liberal government turning their back on Ontario’s manufacturing sector.

When foreign countries were looking to build up their industrial capacity and take manufacturing jobs from Ontario, the Liberals didn’t even put up a fight to keep them, and we saw 300,000 manufacturing jobs chased away under their watch. Their plan crushed Ontario’s goods-producing industries that have served as important regional employers for generations. Workers know that, unlike the Liberals, our government will always put Ontario businesses and Ontario workers first.

Speaker, can the minister please highlight how we are making the case to the U.S. that our historic trading relationship is good for both sides?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Last week, China announced that they have banned the export of the critical minerals gallium, germanium and antimony to the United States. Now, these minerals are crucial to the production of semi-conductors and other key military technologies, and all three of those minerals exist right here in Ontario.

If the U.S. wants to continue to strengthen their military and reshore their chip manufacturing and their supply chains, Ontario is here to help. Let’s build on the long-standing trade relationship that has created good-paying jobs on both sides of the border. We’ve stood shoulder to shoulder with the U.S. for more than 150 years, and we will continue to be here for them in the decades ahead. Speaker, that is the message we delivered in Washington yesterday, and we will continue to deliver the message as we stand up for Ontario businesses and Ontario workers.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Two years ago, my constituent Josephine Crone was diagnosed with stage 4 Hodgkin's lymphoma at the age of 21. The cancer could have been caught earlier if Josephine had just had a family doctor. Instead, it wasn't until she was fainting on campus at Trent University that Josephine was able to get a diagnosis from the university medical clinic. Early diagnosis would have saved Josephine and her family from a very aggressive treatment journey, with all the worry that goes along with it, while also saving money for our health care system.

Why isn't the Premier doing everything in his power to make sure young people like Josephine have a primary care provider?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: It is examples like Josephine and her family why we have focused so much of our efforts to expand access to primary care in the province of Ontario, whether it is 78 new expansions that were announced in February, and actually we've already seen those clinics ramping up, hiring and taking on new patients. In fact, as recently as last week, I was in Minto-Mapleton to announce another physician who is working in that community as a result of these investments.

We have seen that when we make our investments; when we expand access to medical school; when we make sure that anyone in the province of Ontario who wants to come and work in Ontario has the ability to do that quickly, removing some of those paperwork red tape barriers, we see that we are getting those numbers up. In the last two years, we have seen historic numbers of physicians licensing in the province of Ontario. We are going to keep doing that work to make sure everyone has access.

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: More than 165,000 Ottawa residents with no doctor, and yet the Premier is focused on making them pay \$400 a household for his luxury spa instead of getting them a doctor.

I am happy to say that Josephine is now in remission and able to focus on her studies. But she still doesn't have a family doctor, so who is going to monitor for relapses when she graduates and loses access to the university medical centre? Cancer survivors like Josephine deserve peace of mind that they will receive health care, so why can't the Premier take as much interest in providing Ottawa residents with a primary care provider as he does in building a luxury spa that most of us will never use?

Interjections.

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

The Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Perhaps the member opposite has not seen the most recent data that came in from the Canadian Institute for Health Information. CIHI shows

that the Canadian average for attachments for primary care is 85.6%; in Ontario, it's over 90%.

When we compare ourselves to other Canadian jurisdictions, we are absolutely on the right path as we make those expansions, as we make those investments in our medical schools, working with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario to quickly assess, review and ultimately license, when appropriate, internationally educated physicians.

We are seeing people want to live, work and practice in the province of Ontario, and we're going to keep getting it done.

TAXATION

Mr. Will Bouma: My question is for the Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries.

Speaker, we have seen how the Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax is hurting families, hurting workers and hurting businesses. This tax drives up the cost of living and makes everything more expensive, and now, with the new clean electricity regulations, it threatens to undermine Ontario's energy system.

This federal policy is putting our economy and our future at risk. Ontario's industries, whether mining, steel or manufacturing, are global leaders providing good jobs that support families and communities. These industries need support, not higher taxes. The Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax does little to reduce emissions, but it does hurt a lot of competitiveness and investment.

Speaker, can the associate minister please explain how our government is standing up for our industry, protecting jobs and ensuring that our province has an energy system built for the future?

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: The member for Brantford—Brant is absolutely right: Whether they are manufacturers in Brantford, whether they are steel producers in Hamilton or whether they are auto manufacturers across this province—and in the north, as well, with our mining sector—we have seen the impact of the Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax, to the tune of a \$2.5-billion hit to our GDP. The clean energy regulations that are being proposed are damaging to the tune of \$35 billion. These are dollars that could be going into providing good jobs, more jobs for the people of this province.

Speaker, our government has taken a very different approach than the federal Liberals. We have seen them with a punitive approach to businesses that simply echoes the response of Kathleen Wynne, who said that she believed we didn't need to have manufacturing in the province of Ontario; that we were going to become a service-based-only economy.

The reality is, our government is taking an approach that encourages innovation and technology. Last week, this House passed the carbon capture sequestration legislation that is ensuring our energy-intensive industries are able to grow and thrive by cutting costs, reducing—

Interjections.

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

The member for Orléans will come to order. The government House leader will come to order.

Supplementary question?

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

Speaker, the Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax is not just a tax on families; it's a tax on jobs, and it's a tax on opportunity. It makes it harder for Ontario's industries to compete on the global stage. These are same industries that drive innovation, that create good-paying jobs and that keep our economy strong.

1120

Ontario has taken a different path. Instead of driving costs up, our government is driving investment in. With the focus on clean energy solutions like nuclear power, Ontario is showing the world how to grow an economy while cutting emissions. Investments from companies like Honda, like Volkswagen and like Stellantis show that Ontario is a province where businesses want to be. Our province is leading the way with practical solutions, not higher taxes.

Can the associate minister please share more about how our clean energy advantage is creating jobs and securing investments for Ontario's future? Thank you.

Hon. Sam Oosterhoff: I want to thank you the member for Brantford–Brant for his advocacy for his community and for the job creators in his community, because he knows that that job-killing carbon tax is not the answer. In fact, here in the government of Ontario we've taken a different approach. With our green grid, we've been able to attract over \$70 billion of investments into the sectors that are continuing to bring thousands of good jobs here to Ontario.

Last week, we passed the Affordable Energy Act. It's a testament to a commitment to putting more money back into the pockets of job creators so that they can continue to reinvest in our communities like in Brantford–Brant, bring on more workers and ensure that we're able to pay bigger paycheques to those workers.

We're coordinating all energy resources here in the province of Ontario, including electricity, hydrogen and natural gas, as well as non-emitting nuclear energy to make sure that we're reducing the cost of energy in the province of Ontario, continuing to attract more business here to this province and provide good, stable jobs for every person in the province of Ontario.

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Ontario has obligations to honour the final report of the Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites Associated with Indian Residential Schools. The report states that Ontario must support and respect First Nations' right to self-determination and the right to apply our legal systems when it comes to searching for the missing children. What steps is the Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism taking to fulfill this obligation?

Interjections.

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

The member for Brantford–Brant and parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate that question from my friend and colleague across the way from Kiiwetinoong. Our government acknowledges the work of the Office of the Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites Associated with Indian Residential Schools and findings documented in her interim and her final report.

Throughout this process, Ontario has provided important insights towards the report. We will take the time to review the report, and we look forward to our continued work with Indigenous partners as we move forward in reconciliation.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Speaker, I want to say that Ontario is delaying the process by not collaborating with the Wiikwogaming Tiinahtisiwin team from Grassy Narrows. Will the Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism take immediate action to support Grassy Narrows's right to lead their search for unmarked burials and missing ancestors on their traditional territory?

Interjections.

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

The member for Brantford–Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: Again, I appreciate the question very much. Thank you.

Speaker, the painful legacy of the Indian residential school system continues to impact survivors, families and communities through intergenerational trauma. It is crucial for all Ontarians to deepen their understanding of the long-lasting legacies of the Indian residential school system, and that's why our government has led the country and committed \$92.4 million, including \$32.1 million announced just in the 2024 budget, for the identification, investigation, protection and commemoration of burials at former residential schools.

Speaker, we are moving forward on this. We are supporting Indigenous communities as they come through this in a spirit of reconciliation. Again, I appreciate the question, and we will get this done.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: 'Tis the season, everyone, and this government is on the naughty list once again.
Sung to the tune of You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch.

You're a mean one, Mr. Premier

You really are a heel

You're as cuddly as a cactus

You're as charming as an eel

Your province is full of ER closures

You need to focus on issues that are real.

The year 2024 was the worst year for ER closures in Ontario—Clinton, Chesley, Durham. Durham ER had two closures in 2022 and 280 closures in 2024. If I were the MPP for that riding, I wouldn't sleep at night.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier: When is your heart going to grow three sizes so you can finally prioritize health care?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We'll take that in the spirit that I think it was intended.

Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: In July and August of this year, 99% of Ontario ERs remained open. We've actually seen progress being made because we have worked very closely with our hospital partners.

I listened to the member opposite, and I understand that she wasn't here, but you were part of a leadership campaign. You got to choose who your leader was, good or bad, and it was actually Bonnie Crombie who said, "I think some of the" Liberal government's "decisions were too costly for Ontarians"—health care being one of the examples she highlighted.

We are investing 31% more than the previous Liberal government did in our health care system because, frankly, it was ignored for 15 years under that government. We are making the investments to ensure that our hospital partners, our physicians, our RNs, our PSWs, our nurse—

Interjections.

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

I had to stop the clock; I could not hear the Deputy Premier. The House will come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Scarborough—Guildwood will come to order. The member for Perth—Wellington will come to order. The government House leader will come to order. The member for Ottawa South will come to order.

Start the clock. Supplementary question?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Mr. Speaker, picture this: Everyone is home for the holidays gathered around the festive table, celebrating the season, and hopefully—just hopefully—everyone stays healthy, because if not, there may be nowhere to go. ERs are closed. People can't find a family doctor. Wait-lists for life-saving surgeries are through the roof.

Mr. Premier, in Etobicoke, 100,000 residents have no family doctor. You've taken away their health care; are you going to take away their Christmas trees too?

My question to the Premier: When are you going to stop being a grinch and actually fix our broken health care system?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.
Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Perhaps it would help if I quoted Anthony Dale, who is the president and CEO of the Ontario Hospital Association: "The Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) welcomes the government's investments in training and educating emergency department nurses in rural and remote communities, which will help

strengthen the health care workforce, enable nurses to advance in their careers, and ensure Ontario's health care system is prepared for the future."

While we make those investments, you have a leader who believes that they spend too much money on health care systems. You've got to decide which side of that dichotomy you are on. I believe investments made in health care make a difference in our communities. We've seen it with changes that we have made with practice-ready assessments: 26 more physicians who are practising in family medicine in the province of Ontario that didn't exist under the previous government—one program.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Again, I'm going to remind the Minister of Health to make her comments through the Chair and ask the member for Scarborough—Guildwood to come to order.

The next question.

TAXATION

Mr. Matthew Rae: I will not sing for the House. I don't think anyone would want to hear that.

1130

My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness. Because of the Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax, families in Ontario are struggling to put food on the table. Prices are rising and food costs have skyrocketed, forcing farmers to pay more for their operations.

A June 2023 report from the parliamentary budgetary office shows that the carbon tax increases the loss for farm families, forcing them to pass on the cost to consumers. Canadian fruit prices are rising faster than the US and UK, countries with no carbon tax.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Opposition, come to order. Independents, come to order.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Speaker, they heckle me because they don't like the truth. Canadians are paying \$616 more this year alone, and this cost is set to double by 2030. Can the Minister of Agriculture please tell us how our government is standing up for farm families in Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant, the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston.

Mr. John Jordan: Thank you to the member for Perth—Wellington for the question. Here are the facts: A June 2023 Parliamentary Budget Officer report stated, "The bottom 30% of farms increased their losses," because of the carbon tax. We all know affordability is an important issue. They will have to pass those losses onto consumers.

World Bank food price data for September showed that Canadian food prices rose 20% higher than the US and 38% higher than the UK. What do the US and UK have in common? No carbon tax.

A report by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business outlined that \$8 billion was collected from farmers and small businesses because of the Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax.

The Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association says it cost their members \$16 million just last year. They will be forced to pass those costs onto consumers.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation and Parliamentary Budget Officer data showed the true cost of the Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax by every Ontario taxpayer.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: Ontario farm families and food producers are under attack from the Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax. This tax forces farmers to pay more for fuel, fertilizer and transportation. A report from the CFIB shows that \$8 billion has already been drained from farmers and small businesses because of it. The Grain Farmers of Ontario are here today, and I hope the Liberal members meet with them and they can tell them it will cost \$2.7 billion by 2030 to their producers. This tax hurts their ability to compete and puts the cost directly on families at the checkout counter.

Our government, by contrast, is showing strong leadership. We have lowered taxes, cut red tape, and invested in programs to support our agri-food sector.

Can the parliamentary assistant please explain how our government's actions are boosting competitiveness for farmers and processors while keeping food prices affordable for families?

Mr. John Jordan: Speaker, we can't stand by and let the compounding carbon tax grind down our agri-food sector. That's why we lowered taxes and WSIB premiums, boosted our risk management program by \$50 million to \$150 million, and cut red tape for farmers and processors. We enhanced risk management to facilitate a rollover of program funds to future years. We topped up our feeder cattle loan program by \$240 million to a total of \$500 million to help the beef industry grow. We invested \$25 million in the Strategic Agri-Food Processing Fund to build up food processing capacity, and we created the \$25-million Agri-Tech Innovation Initiative for new technologies and equipment to improve productivity and so much more.

Our Grow Ontario Strategy—more production, greater processing capacity, innovation and technology. Those programs will benefit consumers and food supply chains, but the carbon tax is working against us. To the members opposite: Help us axe the tax.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Chris Glover: My question is to the Premier. The Auditor General reports that this Conservative government broke the rules in making the Therme deal at Ontario Place. The rules forbid contact between the government and companies bidding on contracts, but Infrastructure Ontario exchanged nine emails and a phone call with Therme during the bidding process.

The Auditor General also reports that the minister's own office met with companies bidding on the project while bids were being considered. Ontario wants a govern-

ment that works for them, not for a foreign, luxury mega-spa.

With all of this rule-breaking, will the Premier fire the Minister of Infrastructure?

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

Hon. Kinga Surma: I just want to remind the members opposite that I was not the Minister of Infrastructure until year 2021, and I was not responsible for Ontario Place redevelopment until October 2022.

In terms of the AG's words, none of the procurement evaluation team members were from ministers' or the Premier's offices, and there was no evidence of the Premier's office interfering in the process.

According to Mike Lindsay, the CEO of Infrastructure Ontario, which led the process, the AG has found no evidence that there was any inappropriate contact between IO employees and our bidders.

It's truly a shame that the NDP yesterday omitted the fact that they wouldn't even support 50 acres of public realm space at Ontario Place. What this government is doing is building an Ontario Place that can be enjoyed every single day, 365 days of the year, and it will include public realm space, park space, a science centre, a brand new stage—

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

Interjection.

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

Supplementary?

Mr. Chris Glover: What the NDP will not support is handing over 2.2 billion taxpayer dollars to a mega-spa. That's \$400 for every family in this province, and in exchange, Therme only has to reimburse taxpayers \$163 million—which is the present value of the lease—over 95 years. For \$2.2 billion, Ontario could provide a home for all 234,000 people who became homeless under this Conservative government.

Will the Premier cancel this deal now and use the money to bring an end to homelessness in Ontario?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Mike Lindsay, the CEO of Infrastructure Ontario, was very clear that there would be a necessity of government investment in order to provide site servicing on the site. So no matter what you wanted to do on this site—whether you wanted to build a full-out public park—you would still have to make sure that it's connected to utilities, gas, water and telecoms systems. And the AG was very clear that the majority of the increases related to additional costs of adding public realm and parks.

It's very disappointing to all Ontarians, the fact that the NDP don't want 50 acres of public park and realm space at Ontario Place. What a shame.

WINTER HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Northern Ontario has been getting snow for the last three weeks. Since the first snowfall, we've

experienced numerous and extensive closures of Highway 17 and Highway 11, some for days. Clearing highways after a snowfall isn't a matter of convenience for people in Algoma-Manitoulin. It's essential to ensure that people can get to their destinations safely.

Does the minister think it is acceptable for people in northern Ontario to wait up to 24 hours or more for snow to be cleared from their highways?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you for the question. Highway safety is of utmost importance to this government. That's why we invest on winter maintenance and clearing highways over \$100 million every single year, and we'll continue to do so. That is why we have some of the highest winter maintenance standards in North America, especially across Canada.

We deploy over 1,100 pieces of equipment on our highways across this province to get highways clear, to ensure that there is safe access to those roads. We will continue to work with our partners, whether it be the OPP, including our winter maintenance contractors, to ensure that they continue to do the best job possible.

We lead all of North America in our standards on winter clearing, and we will continue to do better and continue to work upon that to ensure that our highways are safe and clear.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again, to the Minister of Transportation: Even when the roads do finally get cleared, their safety is questionable.

Junior Vallières from Dubreuilville sent me these pictures—which I'm delivering now to the minister—of Highway 519 after it had been plowed. In these, you can see that the snow has piled up due to the lack of a wing on the plow. Between the snow and the next lane of traffic, there is about 100 inches of clearance. That means that anyone driving a transport truck has almost no room on either side between them and a collision.

1140

Speaker, every year the northern members on this side of the House raise these concerns with the Minister of Transportation. Just recently, we heard concerning stories from the member for Timiskaming-Cochrane about accidents in his riding. The member from Mushkegowuk-James Bay had introduced legislation to prepare commercial drivers for winter conditions. I introduced a bill to ensure that they are properly examining and training drivers in Ontario.

Instead of addressing our concerns, the minister continues to plow ahead with his repeated non-answers. Minister, how much longer do northerners have to wait for you to take our concerns seriously?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Here are the facts: That member knows that he has a chance to stand up in this House and vote with the government when we invest \$100 million to support the north in our winter maintenance projects across the province. When we talk about commercial safety and investing in infrastructure across our province, whether that was the new Shuniah truck

inspection station that we put up in the north, a \$30-million investment, that member from the north voted against it, along with every one of those colleagues that he mentioned.

We are continuing to lead North America in winter clearance standards, working with law enforcement to ensure that these highways are safe and clean. We have deployed over 1,100 pieces of equipment across our highways to ensure northern Ontario has access to safe roads. We have also installed over 14 additional road weather information systems to help people get access to that information sooner and quicker.

We will continue to work with northern Ontario as a government to invest more than any other government has done for road safety, winter clearance as well as—

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

The next question.

TAXATION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: My question is for the Associate Minister of Forestry and Forest Products. Ontario's forest sector is the cornerstone of the economy, especially in the north. It supports jobs, families and communities. It provides the materials we need for homes, schools and infrastructure. But Speaker, the Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax is making life harder for Ontario's forestry workers. It's driving up costs for fuel, equipment and transportation. It's hurting small businesses and reducing competitiveness.

Meanwhile, our government has been stepping up, showing leadership and standing up for the forestry sector. Through bold action, we've been cutting red tape, reducing taxes and investing in northern jobs. Speaker, can the associate minister please share how our government's investments are making Ontario's forestry sector thrive and support workers across the province?

Hon. Kevin Holland: Thank you to the member from Oxford for that question.

Speaker, the former Liberal government abandoned the forestry sector and strapped it with high taxes and unnecessary red tape. The sector struggled but, with targeted investments made through our forest sector strategy, is mounting a return to position Ontario forestry as leaders in the sector. Today, Ontario's forestry sector generates more than \$18 billion from manufactured goods and services and supports more than 148,000 direct and indirect jobs.

By cutting red tape, by reducing the gas tax and by investing in small business, Ontario is continuing to support our forestry sector and bigger paycheques for northern Ontario workers. We will do what the former Liberal government failed to do: We will support our forestry sector.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you to the minister for the answer.

Ontario's forestry workers and businesses know the value of innovation and hard work. They've been the backbone of communities in the north and across our province. But they face many challenges because of the

Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax. This regressive tax is driving up the cost of fuel, equipment and transportation, making it harder to compete.

Speaker, our government has shown that we understand the importance of standing with our forestry workers. Through targeted investments in technology and innovation, Ontario's forestry sector is now not only recovering but thriving. Projects like advanced wood construction and forest biomass initiatives are creating new opportunities and showing the world that Ontario leads the way.

Can the associate minister please share more about how these investments are driving sustainability and creating jobs in Ontario's forestry sector?

Hon. Kevin Holland: Thank you again to the member from Oxford for that excellent question. I couldn't agree more.

The opposition has no plan for the forestry sector. Meanwhile, our government recognizes that building sustainable housing requires an advanced forest sector strategy and innovation.

Our government is well on its way to making Ontario once again a world leader in forestry and forest products. For example, the Ontario government has provided close to \$8 million in funding for advanced wood construction projects, and we're investing over \$60 million in forest biomass facilities to turn products like sawdust from a sawmill into alternative products like fuel.

It's clear it's our government standing behind our forestry sector, promoting innovation and sustainability. We will continue to get the job done.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

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

The Auditor General's report shows that government advertising spending was the highest-ever recorded, and much of it was on partisan advertising that serves no other purpose than to make the government look good just before an election.

Take the "funding in schools" ad: The government spent \$3 million on an ad to sell a false story that implied that schools were heavily funded and well staffed when we know that's simply not true. Per-student funding has dropped. Schools have major staffing shortages. Violence in schools is a growing problem.

My question is to the Premier: Instead of spending money selling us a false story that everything is fine in education, can this government take this advertising money and invest it in education so our kids can get a good schooling experience?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you for that question. To the member opposite, I don't know; I'm pretty proud of Ontario. I'm proud of the hard-working people in Ontario. Being a business person, I think many who have worked in the private sector know that you have to tell

your story: You have to tell the world how Ontario is a great place to invest and Ontario is a great place to start a business, to grow a business, to support the workers in this great province. We're not an island here—breaking news: We're not an island here in Ontario. We are part of a global market.

That's why it's so important under the leadership of this Premier, the leadership of all the cabinet ministers and caucus right here, that we are promoting Ontario around the world, because this is the best place to invest, this is the best place to work and this is the best place to create wealth for all Ontarians.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, come to order. The member for Hamilton Mountain, come to order.

Supplementary question?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Parents want their kids to go to well-funded schools. They do not want to see government advertising spent on selling a false story that education is fine. That is the real issue that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I heard that one. The member will withdraw her unparliamentary comment.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member will withdraw. The member will stand in her place.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Withdraw.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke will come to order. Order.

The member for University—Rosedale has some time to place her question.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Back to the Premier, the Auditor General's report shows the government spent \$6.8 million on health care advertising, giving the false impression the government is connecting Ontarians to primary care. Some 2.3 million people in Ontario do not have access to a family doctor, and they know full well that an advertising campaign is not going to help them.

My question is to the Premier: Instead of investing money selling us a story about how our health care system is just fine, can this government invest in increasing access to primary care?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Once again, I'm having difficulty hearing the member who has the floor. I would ask the members to come to order.

The Minister of Health.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I would be more than happy to tell you the investments that we've been making in health care. Why? Because the data shows it's working.

We are now over 90% of Ontario residents matched to a primary care practitioner in the province of Ontario. Those numbers are increasing as we make investments in our colleges and universities, expanding the number of seats available for our medical schools; as we work with the College of Physicians and Surgeons to say, you need to assess, you need to review and ultimately license, when

appropriate, internationally trained and educated physicians to come to the province of Ontario.

Two years in a row, we have seen historic high numbers of physicians, internationally trained, who want to work and live in the province of Ontario. Those are the changes we are making as a government to ensure that we have, for decades to come, a health care system that is there for the people of Ontario.

TAXATION

Ms. Jess Dixon: My question is for the Associate Minister of Small Business. As we all know, the holiday season is fast approaching and it's a very critical time particularly for many of our main street businesses. These businesses around aren't just storefronts. They're the heart of our main streets, they sponsor local teams, they employ our friends and our neighbours.

Sadly, as we know, many small businesses are under immense economic pressure as costs continue to rise. The Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax is making everything more expensive—from the cost of shipping products to even heating their stores. The Premier and our government have been strong champions for small businesses and they need our support now more than ever.

Can the associate minister please share what our government is doing to help small businesses grow and thrive despite the heavy burden of this unfair tax?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you to the great member for the important question and for championing small businesses in her riding of Kitchener South—Hespeler.

As the backbone of our economy, small businesses deserve every opportunity to succeed, especially during the holiday season. That's why our government has been steadfast in providing support to these entrepreneurs by making critical contributions, such as our investment to Invest Ottawa that was announced just last week. That includes one and a half million dollars over three years to Invest Ottawa as part of the new deal for Ottawa. The fund will attract new businesses and support local companies to help stimulate sustainable, long-term economic growth. We also continue to fight against the Liberal Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax which unfairly drives up costs for small businesses and consumers alike. Unlike the Liberals, our government believes in putting more money back into the pockets of Ontarians, not burdening them with higher costs.

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

Ms. Jess Dixon: I'm delighted to hear our government is working hard to stand up for small businesses and delivering real solutions to make life easier. Can the associate minister please tell us more about the steps our government is taking to lower costs for small businesses and support our economy?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you again to the member for the great question. We understand the challenges small businesses face, which is why our government has taken decisive action to support them. By reducing the small

business corporate income tax rate, increasing the employer health tax exemption and rebating over \$2.5 billion in the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board surpluses to hundreds of thousands of safe employers, we have put more money back into the hands of our entrepreneurs.

In stark contrast, the Trudeau-Crombie carbon tax is raising costs for everything small businesses depend on. We continue to call on the federal government to scrap this harmful tax and allow Ontario's businesses to thrive without these unnecessary burdens. This holiday season we're also encouraging—

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

DEFERRED VOTES

TIME ALLOCATION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, we have a deferred vote on government notice of motion number 29, relating to the allocation of time on 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.

Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1154 to 1159.

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

Mr. Leardi has moved government notice of motion number 29 relating to the allocation of time on 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.

All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

| | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Allsopp, Tyler | Gallagher Murphy, Dawn | Rae, Matthew |
| Anand, Deepak | Grewal, Hardeep Singh | Riddell, Brian |
| Babikian, Aris | Hardeman, Ernie | Romano, Ross |
| Bailey, Robert | Hogarth, Christine | Sabaw, Sheref |
| Barnes, Patrice | Holland, Kevin | Sandhu, Amarjot |
| Bethlenfalvy, Peter | Jones, Sylvia | Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh |
| Bouma, Will | Jones, Trevor | Sarrazin, Stéphane |
| Bresee, Ric | Jordan, John | Saunderson, Brian |
| Byers, Rick | Kanapathi, Logan | Skelly, Donna |
| Calandra, Paul | Ke, Vincent | Smith, Dave |
| Cho, Raymond Sung Joon | Leardi, Anthony | Smith, David |
| Cho, Stan | Lecce, Stephen | Smith, Graydon |
| Clark, Steve | Lumsden, Neil | Smith, Laura |
| Coe, Lorne | Martin, Robin | Surma, Kinga |
| Crawford, Stephen | McCarthy, Todd J. | Tangri, Nina |
| Cuzzetto, Rudy | Mulroney, Caroline | Thanigasalam, Vijay |
| Dixon, Jess | Oosterhoff, Sam | Thompson, Lisa M. |
| Dowie, Andrew | Pang, Billy | Tibollo, Michael A. |
| Downey, Doug | Parsa, Michael | Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. |
| Dunlop, Jill | Piccini, David | Wai, Daisy |
| Fedeli, Victor | Pinsonneault, Steve | Williams, Charmaine A. |
| Flack, Rob | Pirie, George | Yakabuski, John |
| Ford, Doug | Quinn, Nolan | |

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

| | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Andrew, Jill | Gélinas, France | Sattler, Peggy |
| Armstrong, Teresa J. | Glover, Chris | Schreiner, Mike |
| Begum, Doly | Harden, Joel | Shamji, Adil |
| Bell, Jessica | Hsu, Ted | Shaw, Sandy |
| Blais, Stephen | Jama, Sarah | Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) |
| Bourgouin, Guy | Karpoche, Bhutila | Tabuns, Peter |
| Brady, Bobbi Ann | Kernaghan, Terence | Taylor, Monique |
| Clancy, Aislinn | Mamakwa, Sol | Vanthof, John |
| Collard, Lucille | Mantha, Michael | Vaugeois, Lise |
| Fife, Catherine | McMahon, Mary-Margaret | West, Jamie |
| Fraser, John | Pasma, Chandra | Wong-Tam, Kristyn |
| Gates, Wayne | Rakocevic, Tom | |

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 68; the nays are 35.

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

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Before I recess the House, I'll remind the members, if they can stay for a few minutes after the recess for a short briefing, that would be appreciated very much.

This House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1204 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

RAFIGA LAW PROFESSIONAL CORPORATION ACT, 2024

Ms. Begum moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr53, An Act to revive Rafiga Law Professional Corporation.

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

First reading agreed to.

1976998 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2024

Ms. Dixon moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr61, An Act to revive 1976998 Ontario Inc.

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

First reading agreed to.

PETITIONS

HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

MPP Jamie West: This petition has to do with a 14-kilometre section of Highway 67. Basically, back in 1998, it was downloaded to the town of Iroquois Falls, and it's now a municipal road. Whereas the population of the town

has declined by a significant number, it lacks the financial resources and the capabilities to properly maintain this road, to the point where the maintenance has created a significant safety risk to users of it. It's a vital link to Highway 101 west for residents and emergency services. They really are considering turning it back into a gravel road in this area, because they can't maintain the road. There's going to be a short window where maybe the snow will smooth it over enough, but it's significant damage to the road. This is a perfect time to put in a repair plan or re-upload it to the province.

They have asked that the government of Ontario and the Ministry of Transportation take back responsibility for the highway to ensure user safety, proper care and maintenance.

I know this is very important. I only have two pages full of signatures, but we've read other ones in the past. I know it's a major issue in that area.

I support the petition. I'll affix my signature to it and provide it to page Maadhav for the table.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I have a very significant petition, and many people in this Legislature, many MPPs, have discussed this issue. I want to thank Sally Palmer from McMaster University for submitting these petitions. She's an advocate for having ODSP rates and OW rates be doubled. We know that people live in poverty and that what they live on—\$733 for OW and around \$1,300 for ODSP—just isn't enough, with the way the cost of living is. Affordability is high for everyone. And with the cost of food, gas, utilities and rent going up, it's so necessary.

I petition the government to double ODSP rates and OW rates, so that everyone in our society has a dignified way of living.

I'll also sign my petition and pass it to page Elissa.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I have a petition here with regard to the Ring of Fire.

To summarize the petition: It talks about how Ontario has a vast reserve of critical minerals. It also talks about the development of clean technologies. It talks about how developing the Ring of Fire will create high-quality jobs and will also marry the mighty mineral wealth of the north with the mighty manufacturing power of the south, securing a perfect domestic supply chain here in Ontario.

Finally, it calls upon the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario to prioritize the development of the Ring of Fire and the critical mineral sector as a key component of Ontario's industry.

I support this petition. I will sign it and give it to page Aida to bring to the Clerks' table.

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Melissa Anderson from Val Caron in my riding for these petitions. They're called "Improve Winter Road Maintenance on Northern Highways."

Speaker, winter is in place in northern Ontario. I can tell you that I've had the pleasure of shovelling twice already—it's not really a pleasure, but I still have to do it.

The road maintenance has been atrocious. I spoke about Highway 144 yesterday. I can tell you that people are sending me pictures. This big transport truck came down, tried to put the brakes on, could not, ended up going sideways. This is a two-lane highway with no shoulders. The transport truck was right across. Nothing could go up or down. You know there are a lot of mines—Iamgold has shifts every 15 minutes; so does Vale; so does Glencore. Yet, the highway was closed for hours because of the poor maintenance.

We also know that the maintenance of our roads in northern Ontario has been privatized. I don't know how the private enterprises measure the minimum of 31.75 millimetres before they go out, but when there's a foot of snow, they should be plowing the highway, and they are not.

So we want Highways 11, 17, 69, 101 and 144 to be declared class 1 highways, so that they require the pavement to be bare within eight hours of the end of a snowfall, and to bring the management of the road maintenance back into the public sector if the private contractors are not going to do their job. People's lives depend on it. People's ability to go to work, to go to the doctor, to go to school depends on it. It has to improve.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Once again, I'm going to remind the members that the standing order suggests that we should briefly summarize the petition. We can indicate the number of signatures. But I would ask you not to make additional political commentary associated with the issues raised in the petition.

Petitions?

CHILD CARE

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I am tabling a petition called "Create Child Care Spaces Now." This petition was created in response to the cancellation of 48 school-based child care projects, five in my community alone.

I want to thank the over 1,000 parents, guardians and advocates for education in my community and for child care who all stated that child care must be affordable and that parents and guardians should not have to choose between child care and work. Again, I want to thank all of those who have signed this in support.

I proudly support this petition. I will be signing it and giving it to page Andrew.

MANUFACTURING SECTOR

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I have a petition that deals with electric vehicle manufacturing.

To summarize the petition: It talks about how electric vehicle manufacturing creates thousands of jobs. It says that electric vehicles reduce emissions and support the global transition to cleaner energy and also support emerging technologies.

1510

Finally, it calls upon the government of the province of Ontario to support the development of electric vehicle manufacturing here in the province of Ontario through investment.

I support this petition. I will sign it and give it to page Jonah to deliver to the Clerks' table.

TUITION

Ms. Doly Begum: I have a petition here. I would like to thank the students across the province who continue to organize and fight for their right to have, one, free and accessible education for all; two, grants, not loans—and make sure that there is legislated students' right to organize. I've met with a lot of these students, including with student associations. This particular petition—I would like to thank student unions and the Canadian Federation of Students across Ontario.

This one particularly speaks to the increase of 215% for undergraduate tuition fees—as well as, for graduate tuition fees, 247%. This is a huge increase, counting the inflation and seeing the rise in tuition fees, and yet we have not had that funding that is necessary for students to have accessible education.

The other thing they point out is, 50% of students will have a median debt of around \$17,500. This is just an estimate. It takes an average of nine to 10 years to repay that debt, if they are lucky to be able to do that.

The average undergraduate tuition for international students has also increased enormously—it was already triple from domestic students. That has increased about 192% between 2011 and 2021, in colleges. They pay an average of \$14,000 annually compared to the average domestic students—which is about \$3,228.

I fully support this petition.

I call on the government to make changes to OSAP and student financial assistance across this province, to make sure that there is support for students, because, due to the bills that this government has brought in, there is a resulting about \$1-billion cut that took place just in the first term of this government.

I will affix my signature to it and give it to page Donnique to take to the Clerks.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Once more, I'll ask members not to make additional political commentary related to the contents of the petition that they're summarizing.

Petitions?

ADDICTION SERVICES

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to present a petition from the RNAO and especially thank Janet Ball in my riding for bringing this issue forward.

The RNAO are very much experts when it comes to supervised consumption services, and they're asking this government to maintain those sites, to keep them open, because a person dies every two and a half hours from toxic drug supply. They keep people out of emergency rooms. They help front-line responders—not having to respond to issues of overdoses. They are very, very important in the continuum of care for people who are experiencing addiction diseases.

So they're asking to reverse a decision to close the supervised consumption sites and ensure that established SCS sites remain in operation and have adequate funding to keep them the way they are, and to increase funding for the sites—including inhalation and other harm reduction services—for every community, because we know this illness is widespread. Access to voluntary and publicly funded, not-for-profit, evidence-based treatments—like service sites—is so important.

I fully support this petition. I will give it to page Juliet. I will sign the petition as well.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I have a petition that I fully support. The petition calls for the expansion and improvement of highways to strengthen Ontario's economy and improve access to economic opportunities.

I am signing this petition and passing it on to our page Anuva.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I am pleased to rise today to table a petition entitled “Create Child Care Spaces Now.”

We all know that child care is incredibly important for allowing parents to enter the workforce and, therefore, very important to the economic security of women. When child care isn't affordable, then it makes women and mothers make choices between participating in the workforce and looking after their children.

Unfortunately, the government recently announced the cancellation of 48 school-based child care projects, which is putting the affordability of child care in the province in jeopardy, particularly as we do not have enough spaces to meet the demand in the province.

The signatories are saying that our communities deserve safe and affordable child care spaces. They are calling on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately restore funding to the cancelled school-based projects and commit to building additional child care spaces to meet demand in Ontario.

I wholeheartedly endorse this petition. I will add my name to it and send it to the table with page Charlotte.

SENIORS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have a petition called “Support Low-Income Seniors on” guaranteed annual income support.

The Ontario government introduced the guaranteed annual income support in 1974. Unfortunately, there haven't been annual increases to the amount, which, right now, means that low-income seniors, if they get money from CPP and old age security and the guaranteed income supplement—they make more than what the guaranteed annual income support says. So they would like the guaranteed income support to account for the 40 years of inflation since it was introduced—and then bring in a yearly cut-off increase based on inflation.

I think this is reasonable. I will affix my name to it and ask my good page Dawson to bring it to the Clerk.

PUBLIC SAFETY

MPP Jamie West: This petition is entitled “Protect 2SLGBTQI+ Communities and Drag Artists.”

Basically, they discuss the increase in hate crimes and harassment towards the 2SLGBTQI+ community and then the high level of intimidation that has been happening by the extremists who are targeting this community.

They also talk about how drag becomes a liberating and empowering art form for the community, and it's a way for them to see themselves represented in the community.

I think we can all agree that anyone in Ontario deserves to feel safe anywhere they go in Ontario.

The undersigned are petitioning the assembly to pass the protecting 2SLGBTQI+ communities act so that safety zones can deter the biggest harassment. They would also like an advisory committee to be struck to protect the 2SLGBTQI+ communities from hate crimes.

I support this petition. I'll affix my signature and provide it to page Mahee for the table.

CANCER TREATMENT

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank P.J. Taylor from Hanmer in my riding for these petitions. They're called “Coverage for Take-Home Cancer Drugs.”

As you know, Speaker, if you need a drug while you're admitted into the hospital for cancer treatment, it's all covered. But now, more and more treatment can be done at home, which means that you need to take your cancer drugs at home. If you live in Ontario, it is not covered. If you live in British Columbia, in Alberta, in Saskatchewan, in Manitoba, in Quebec, it will be covered.

The Canadian Cancer Society has called on the Ontario government to cover take-home cancer drugs, and many, many people have signed the petition so that the Ontario government would cover take-home cancer drugs.

I think this is a good idea. I will affix my name to it and ask page Ahilan to bring it to the Clerk.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our petitions for this afternoon.

colonial institutions in Ontario, which is this Ontario Legislature.

We are moving in steps towards reconciliation, towards getting things better where we come from, in northern Ontario and northwestern Ontario, in the riding of Kiiwetinoong.

A couple of weeks ago, about a day before I was supposed to do my private member's bill acknowledging September 30 as a statutory holiday, a day of reflection on Indian residential schools, I got a call from my sister, who said that my mum had a fall and she got medevaced out. You have to understand, when we medevac out, we're talking about Ornge; we're talking about a medevac plane to come and pick up anybody from up north by a fixed-wing aircraft, taking them to a hospital, because we don't have hospitals on reserves. So she ended up in emerg. They needed to do whatever they needed to do to make sure that she was okay from that fall. She had to get a CT scan. But she went back a few days later, which is good. One of the things that she struggles with—she's got her good days, she's got her bad days, when we talk about dementia. So I'm glad she's okay. I was almost prepared to withdraw or not even talk about my bill at that time.

1530

Again, I'm going to talk about Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre. "Meno Ya Win" is a word that says "wellness." Meno Ya Win was opened back in 2010, which is only 14 years ago. It became a provincial hospital. Before that, we had two hospitals in Sioux Lookout, in a town of 5,000, 6,000 people. We had the federal hospital, which is for First Nations people like me, people who look like me, and then we had another hospital, a provincial hospital—I don't know how to say this; it's for other people. It's for white people, I'll say. It was only in 1997 that they amalgamated those two hospitals. Even though there were two sites, they amalgamated them and they integrated all the programming and everything like that. It wasn't until 2010 that they finally opened a brand new hospital, which is now a provincial hospital. The federal government got out of the business of health care, and they do not have any resources that they put toward the provincial hospital. That's what Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre is now. It's a 54-bed facility.

Returning to article 18(1) of the bill, I just want to say again how important it is that the cultural, linguistic, religious, and spiritual needs and rights of residents are respected and fulfilled. For First Nations patients, this is essential. Just respecting the needs—it's not enough. Care providers must go further to ensure that patients can practise their ways of life. There are already health care spaces that are making great efforts to do this.

I want to recognize the Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre for setting an example for the rest of Ontario with their traditional programs for elders.

I want to give a shout-out to some of the team doing this work. Kathy Loon, Ojibway, vice-president of traditional programs and equity, diversity and inclusion—she's from Slate Falls. The elders and residents: Elder Betsy Beardy, who is, again, Anishinew, Oji-Cree; Elder Ralph Johnson, Ojibway; Elder Priscilla Kakekaspan, who

is Cree. Also, the interpreters: Tom Chapman, who speaks our language, Anishiniimowin; Josephine Turtle; Jessie Ashamugeesha, Ojibway; Sophie Crane, Ojibway; and Violet Michimity. The role that this team plays is so crucial for so many.

The area served by Meno Ya Win has approximately 30,000 people. There's no option for people from the northern First Nations to access long-term care or home care within the community. We only have 20 long-term-care beds currently. Because there is also no room in long-term care in Sioux Lookout, the hospital is being used as a last resort. Over half of the hospital is people waiting to get into long-term care. Families are put into a position to send their family members out of their home communities, out of their home First Nations, away from their families, but aren't able to go themselves due to the cost of travelling from the northern First Nations. In the absence of family and far away from home, this team becomes the cultural bridge, the Anishinaabe in the room. Often, they're the only people there at the end-of-life stage to hold hands, cry, listen and pray together. We have elders who die alone in these places. How cruel.

In a hospital, in a long-term-care facility, the health care workers can provide the important physical care needed, but often the emotional, mental and spiritual care goes unmet. These are all connected. The key aspect of culturally appropriate care at Meno Ya Win Health Centre in Sioux Lookout is regular daily visits to the patient from someone who speaks their language—especially older patients and patients with dementia.

In Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre, the interpreters and elders assist patients with their spiritual needs and care, focusing on patients who are palliative or near palliative—although they also work with other patients situationally, whether it's in a maternity ward, trauma patients, or young people needing support when their *kohkom*—*d^hd^c*—their grandparent, passes away.

The program works closely with the pastoral care program, often providing assistance to each other. The interpreters regularly sing songs from the Cree hymn book and other spiritual songs. The traditional program team has culturally appropriate clothes available for women who need to wear a specific dress code. The team provides sacred objects and plants that somebody might need. The palliative room is close to the healing room. It's so easy for palliative patients who practise their ways of life to participate in ceremonies like smudging.

Speaker, it is also important to have traditional foods available to feed people and their spirit and their body.

At the time of passing, the team often practises Anishinaabe rituals if the family is not there or if they need support. After a passing, families can use the healing room to perform cedar baths for their loved one.

Another aspect of what this team does is sharing knowledge and language to non-Anishinaabe staff so they can say a few words or greet patients in one of the Anishinaabe languages, to promote trust.

The work of the traditional programming team at the Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win Health Centre is an import-

ant example of what a thoughtful and comprehensive approach to culturally appropriate care looks like. However, the cruel reality is, to access this care, First Nations elders have to travel far from home and far away from their families, because they cannot access long-term care or home care in their home community.

1540

I have asked this before, and I ask again: Why aren't we entitled to age comfortably in our homes and in our communities, and to receive equitable health care regardless of where we live?

The way forward for having a long-term-care system that respects the rights and the ways of life of First Nations people is to co-develop a distinctions-based, community-led, Indigenous long-term-and-continuing-care framework, with a priority of ensuring that First Nations peoples are able to receive long-term-and-continuing-care services in or near their own communities and, just as important, culturally appropriate care and programming.

Long-term-care homes will only be available to fully implement legislative changes if they have the staffing and hours to do so.

Unfortunately, my time has ended, so meegwetch for listening.

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

Mr. Ross Romano: I am going to utilize something that I learned several years ago and had the privilege to learn. I want to start by saying: Ross Romano [*remarks in Anishnaabemowin.*] What I just said was, my name is Ross Romano. I come from Baawiting; that is Sault Ste. Marie. Good afternoon, everyone. It's a pleasure for me to be here with you all here today.

I want to ask the member—and I asked a similar question earlier in the day. I trust in my heart that you know and that all members know that—I think we all know we're here for all the right reasons, and we really do want to try to help. I mentioned this earlier. I was very moved by the speech provided by our minister at the outset. Do you trust that we are trying to help all of our seniors through legislation like this?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you for the question.

This bill takes some positive steps forward, but it doesn't go the whole way.

Firstly, what I'm talking about is, this bill does not address the staffing shortages faced in long-term care.

When I visit the hospital, when I visit the elders in the community and I talk to the nurses, I will ask the nurses, "How long have you been here?" They'll say, "I'm only here for two weeks. I come and then I'm scheduled here for the two weeks." But when I ask where they are from, they'll say, "I'm from Brampton"—all the way to Sioux Lookout. You can tell that there's a shortage of nurses in the hospital, but also within Ontario. Meegwetch.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Meegwetch to my colleague for his speech.

I'm happy to see the step, moving forward, for the people who depend on the Sioux Lookout hospital and long-term care for their needs.

But there have been First Nations people throughout Ontario for thousands of years. We've had long-term-care facilities in Ontario for a very long time.

How would the member describe the availability of First Nations-led, First Nations-welcoming long-term-care facilities everywhere we find First Nations communities, whether it be in my riding in the northeast or in the southwest or in the east of the province or everywhere else we have a thriving First Nations community? Do they have access to long-term care?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch to the member for the question.

Again, when I describe what Kiiwetinoong looks like—we have 31 First Nations, and 24 of those 31 are fly-ins. None of those places have a facility that has long-term care. There are some First Nations that have elder homes, without the proper programming in those homes. I think that is the reality.

When I talk to elders, what they'd like to see is community-led, where they can eat the traditional foods that they grew up eating, being able to speak the language, our own people taking care of our own people—that's the vision. I think at some point in time, when we work together, that's the vision that we would like to see, whether it's 20, 40, 60 years down the road, when we will have our own long-term-care facilities in the First Nations in northern Ontario.

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

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the member from Kiiwetinoong for your remarks and your passion and bringing the voice of First Nations people each and every day. Thank you for your advocacy. We really appreciate it.

Madam Speaker, dementia is a growing and deeply concerning issue among residents not only in my riding—my riding is the most ethnically diverse riding in Canada, according to the census. Also, there is a large seniors' population and different demographics moving in.

My mother died of dementia. She was bedridden for three years, and she died in 2021, almost three years ago.

This bill is significant. These alarming rates of diagnosis have been raised, and this bill is addressing dementia. Dementia is a burden on families, long-term-care caregivers and staff. The government has proposed the amendment to the dementia care program—a program which is aimed to elevate care quality, introduce consistent standards across all homes, and provide better support for those living with the challenging condition.

My question to the member: Can you explain why you are electing to support this critical amendment?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch to the member from Markham-Thornhill for the question.

I think it's very clear, for me, anyway: This bill is supportable. Many of the elements are amendments that, again, were introduced before, when the government

tabled the Fixing Long-Term Care Act—including dementia care and better access to cultural programming.

We have a 54-bed facility in Sioux Lookout, servicing 33,000 people, and we have 20 long-term-care beds, servicing 33,000 people. I was very glad and happy to be able to hear the minister, last week, announce the planning grant for Sioux Lookout Meno Ya Win, to add 76 additional beds after waiting for so long for those long-term beds. I think it goes hand in hand with this legislation.

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Meegwetch to the member for Kiiwetinoong for his very thoughtful comments on this legislation and the impact on First Nations people across the province.

I think all of us who have had a loved one in long-term care have stories about what that transition was like for them.

My grandma, who immigrated to Canada from the Netherlands in her thirties, had dementia when she was moved into a long-term-care facility. She was eating new foods for the first time in her life during that experience. As her dementia progressed, she was lapsing more and more into Dutch. Thankfully, there was a staff person who just happened to speak Dutch and could communicate with her and who called her “Oma,” which was a lovely experience.

My grandma didn't have any trauma around losing her culture or her language; there was just the challenge of navigating this new path while having dementia.

But I know, for members of the First Nations community, many of them have that trauma of the colonial system trying to take their language and their culture away.

1550

Can the member speak to what that experience would be like for an elder in a long-term-care facility who then does not have access to their language or culture in the facility?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for the question from the member.

Sometimes when our elders have to leave their families, what they are leaving is their grandchildren, great-grandchildren, their children, and all the siblings they have. They get sent far away, to a place where there is no cultural language or ways of life as part of the care. What that does to an elder who only speaks our languages is a retraumatization—of the former Indian residential school process, where, as kids, you take them away. We continue that process of colonization and oppression when we take them away as elders.

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

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: I rise today, as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Long-Term Care, to speak in support of the Support for Seniors and Caregivers Act, 2024.

I just want to say, before I dive into the material, that I am so inspired by seniors. There's an old cliché that seniors built this country, and it's one of those things that

gets said so often because it's true. These are the people who raised us and who built the infrastructure that we rely on, the social supports that we have, and all of the businesses that employ so many people across our communities. After 20 and 30 and 40 years of work, we would be excusing those seniors if they wanted to stay home and just relax. But that isn't what we find, is it?

Everywhere I go across the Bay of Quinte, whether it's in Picton or Belleville or Trenton or Bloomfield or anywhere across my riding, when I meet with service clubs and with charities and when I go to local events and anywhere where volunteerism is required, what we find is our seniors continuing to come out and continuing to support us. Because our seniors continue to support us, we will never stop supporting seniors.

This legislation shows our government's continued commitment to ensuring our Ontario seniors receive the respect, care and support that they deserve, wherever they call home.

As this chamber well knows, Ontario continues to grow at an unprecedented rate due to the success of our government in building Ontario to once again be the economic engine of Canada. However, as we continue this growth, Ontario's senior population will continue to grow with it. This is why we are introducing this legislation to ensure those seniors get the care they need where they need it. While this demographic shift opens opportunities for innovation and community-building, it also presents challenges that we must address head-on, and this government is addressing those challenges head-on. You can see that through the incredible mandate that we have at long-term care: to build and redevelop 58,000 units by 2028, with \$6.4 billion in capital spending, and putting forward \$4.9 billion to hire thousands of PSWs and nurses to make sure that we're appropriately staffing the system and that we can accommodate the growth to come, while also growing the level of care that our seniors are receiving in long-term-care settings, with the goal of four hours per day.

Today, we come together to take meaningful steps to ensure that our seniors have access to the supports they need, regardless of whether they live in their own homes, in retirement residences, or in long-term-care facilities.

This growth in the senior population isn't something that affects one or two communities; it affects everywhere in Ontario.

I can tell you that my home community of Bay of Quinte is one of the oldest in Ontario, not only because it's such a great place for seniors to live, but because as many people relocate, they look for the supports that we have across the Bay of Quinte.

I've met many people in the Bay of Quinte who continue to share stories about their loved ones and their care. I've heard from these people that no single care setting can meet every need.

This legislation is designed to connect Ontario seniors to the support that they require wherever they may be.

In the coming years, our senior population will grow substantially. Across Canada, the number of seniors is

expected to increase by 68% over the next two decades. Here in Ontario, those aged 65 and older represent the fastest-growing age group in the province. In 2016, 16.4% of Ontario's population was 65 or older. By 2041, that percentage is projected to reach 25%, meaning nearly one in four Ontarians will be a senior. This growth represents an increase from three million seniors in 2016 to 4.6 million by 2041.

As people age, their needs grow more complex. Some require only minimal social supports, while others rely on caregivers or need access to specialized medical care.

This bill builds on our government's work to create a robust, multi-faceted support system that—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I apologize to the member; I do have to interrupt.

Pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader directs the debate to continue.

The member for Essex.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Speaker, please continue the debate.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I'll go back to the member for Bay of Quinte to continue debate.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: My speech just got 30 seconds shorter, so there you go. We're filling time.

It is important to remember that seniors are not just another group in our society; they are our parents, our aunts and uncles, our mentors, and our loved ones. They are the individuals who raised us, built our communities and contributed to the success of our great province. They deserve nothing less than our unwavering commitment to providing them with the love, care and dignity that they truly have earned.

It has been said before, but it deserves to be repeated: Our seniors took care of us, and it's time for us to take care of them. This is a mindset that animates all that we do at the Ministry of Long-Term Care and, indeed, across government. "Working for You" is not just a slogan; it is how this government, under this Premier, approaches every problem that we encounter. We work for the people of Ontario, no matter their age or where they call home.

The Support for Seniors and Caregivers Act, 2024, is not just about individual programs or policies; it is part of a larger coordinated effort to improve the lives of seniors and their caregivers. It brings together the collective will and might of the Ministry of Long-Term Care, Ministry of Health and the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility, working together to ensure seniors and their caregivers get the support that they deserve. This act unifies these three ministries, to bring their expertise and resources together to better serve seniors living independently in their communities, residents of retirement homes, and individuals in long-term-care facilities.

The pillars this legislation is built on reflect an evidence-based approach tailored to the needs and priorities of Ontario's seniors. These pillars are: dementia care and

supports; supporting seniors, families and caregivers; and protecting seniors and enhancing social connections. Let me speak broadly about what these three pillars represent for our constituents and for our seniors.

The first pillar focuses on one of the most pressing challenges facing seniors today: dementia. We all know someone who has been affected by dementia. Whether it's a loved one, a friend or a friend of a friend, it is really something that is inescapable for many people, and it's indiscriminate. It doesn't care about how wealthy you are, how poor you are, about what colour your skin may be or what religion you may practise. Unfortunately, for too many, dementia comes for them.

In fact, one of my earliest memories is centred around dementia. My Great-Grandma Burgess was driving in the car with us. I was probably four years old. I remember that on this trip—it was about 20 minutes—every minute and a half, she would ask where her purse was, and my mom would look back from the front seat and say, "Don't worry, Grandma. It's with you. You have it." She would settle down, and then another 90 seconds later—"I must have left my purse. I don't have it with me." Sure enough, there it was, right beside her. I remember, after that car ride, asking my parents what this meant. What was it that was going on? They explained to me that our great-grandmother, Grandma Burgess, was suffering from dementia.

Currently, around 250,000 Ontarians are living with dementia. Alarming, the Alzheimer Society predicts dementia cases in Ontario will rise by 202% between 2020 and 2050. This staggering statistic underscores the urgency of the action that is required.

Dementia profoundly impacts not only those diagnosed, but also their families and caregivers. The emotional toll is significant on loved ones and caregivers, which is why our government is here to provide support.

1600

Our government is committed to ensuring that individuals living with dementia receive the care and support that they need. Under this legislation, all long-term-care homes will be required to establish organized dementia care programs, similar to the existing requirements for palliative care. This amendment builds on the previous investments in programs like Behavioural Supports Ontario, which will provide evidence-based care for seniors with dementia and related conditions.

Additionally, we are investing in emotion-based care training for long-term-care staff. This approach humanizes care, prioritizes empathy and focuses on individual needs and on building meaningful relationships. Certainly this is something that I have encountered as I have toured many of the long-term-care homes that we have across Ontario—it's the institutional feel that many of them have. You walk by hallways that are painted the same colours and doors that are indistinguishable from the next one. I'm a fairly young person—I'm very thankful that I don't struggle with dementia at this point in my life, though I may at some point—and I have trouble navigating these hallways.

Without any sort differentiating colours or approaches, it does become difficult for people to remember where they are, and they feel like they're in a foreign setting. So we're focused on creating smaller, home-like environments that improve the quality of life for residents with dementia. This builds upon the success of the Fixing Long-Term Care Act, which is continuing to transform how care is delivered in long-term care, to ensure all residents get the quality of care they deserve and expect. Our residents must know we are ensuring consistency in care.

We are also working with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to incorporate advanced dementia training into personal support worker education. This will equip future caregivers with the skills they need to provide compassionate, person-centred dementia care. Issues like this one are at the heart of our commitment to work for Ontario's seniors, to work for those who provide care, to ensure a long-term-care home isn't just called a home; it is, in fact, a home.

Since coming to the Ministry of Long-Term Care, I have come to understand fully why this concept is so important. People come to long-term care not to die, but to live, and ensuring their comfort and support is paramount to this goal. This alone is enough to support this bill, and I encourage every member to do so.

But we're not done, not by a long shot. As we move on, the second pillar emphasizes the importance of supporting not only our seniors, but also their families and caregivers. This legislation amends the Retirement Homes Act, 2010, to strengthen residents' rights to receive support from caregivers, including family members and friends. Similar provisions in the Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021, further reinforced the critical role of caregivers in the health system.

As anyone who has cared for a member of their family who struggles with dementia or is in a long-term-care home knows, it is absolutely exhausting to do so, not just physically, but also emotionally, specifically for that generation that feels caught in the middle of caring for their children at home and also for their parents, who may be residing in long-term care.

In fact, a friend of mine, a number of years ago, when we were about 21—his father had been quite old when he had him; he was about 55. And so my friend of 21 years old was visiting his father, who was about 75 at the time, in long-term care. At 21, I don't know about most of you, but I certainly still had a tremendous amount of need for the guidance of my parents. Unfortunately for this individual, he would go and visit his father, who didn't recognize him. The emotional weight of that, you could see every day when he would come into work, was really grinding him down.

This isn't the only story. I know that the member from Thornhill has cared for two relatives over a 15-year period, and a lot of the information that is in this bill, and certainly in their private member's bill, is informed by that experience. To address the diverse needs of seniors, this legislation also requires long-term-care homes to imple-

ment programs that respect and celebrate cultural, linguistic and spiritual diversity. These programs will ensure that residents can maintain their identities and traditions, fostering a sense of belonging and well-being.

Beyond legislative changes, we are making significant investments to support seniors and their caregivers. Over the next three years, \$20 million will be allocated to expand adult day programs. These programs provide social activities for seniors, reducing isolation and offering much-needed respite for caregivers.

Additionally, a pilot project, Community Access to Long-Term Care, will extend certain long-term-care services to seniors who are living at home in the community. This innovative initiative will provide access to recreational programs, clinical services, and personal care for seniors who prefer to age in place. This is an incredibly important piece of this legislation. It will allow the ministry to gather the information to expand the reach of care beyond the walls of long-term care. I am personally excited by the prospect. I know those in Bay of Quinte who are waiting for long-term care and expanding supports to them no matter where they live is something that I will always support.

Indeed, I want to speak clearly to everyone outside this chamber: Our government is working to ensure that all seniors get the support they deserve—that we are working for you every day, that since the day I was elected, I have worked to get it done for all of you.

Caregivers also deserve more recognition and support. That's why we are enhancing funding for the Ontario Caregiver Organization to improve caregiver programs and health provider education. This investment acknowledges the vital role that caregivers play as part of health care teams and aims to make their work more manageable.

Finally, the third pillar focuses on safeguarding seniors and fostering social engagement. As we know, isolation and loneliness are significant challenges for many seniors, particularly those living alone. I see the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility here today, and he has spoken forcefully on the need to address these issues and I'm happy to lend my voice to these today. In fact, if you haven't had an opportunity to tour with the minister, I highly recommend it. We've gone to several different seniors' fairs together in Wellington and in Belleville, and the energy that he brings to those rooms is absolutely incredible.

When the minister got up and said to everyone in the crowd, "I have a way to make all of you look more beautiful and younger," the attention was so focused. You could hear a pin drop in that room. He said, "What you need to do is throw your hands up in the air and do a big belly laugh," and all of a sudden, probably 150 or 200 seniors are throwing their hands in the air and laughing along with the minister and me. It was absolutely an incredible experience. I want to thank you for taking the time to come visit me in my riding and share that joy that you bring to everything that you do. Thank you very much.

Also, when we talk about seniors who continue to contribute, I believe that the minister is the oldest parlia-

mentarian in Ontario's history. In fact, his political career is older than I am and began when he was 54 years old—so absolutely incredible. Thank you for all that you do.

As we know, loneliness and isolation are factors that can exacerbate health issues and increase vulnerability to abuse. To address this, our government is investing \$17 million over three years to expand programming at seniors active living centres. These centres offer a variety of activities—ranging from cultural and educational programs to fitness classes—that promote physical health, mental stimulation and social connections. With this funding, we will increase the number of centres by 33%, adding 100 new programs across Ontario.

To protect seniors from abuse and neglect, this legislation introduces stricter penalties for individuals and institutions that fail to uphold care standards. These new offences under the Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021, will hold individuals accountable for directly abusing or neglecting residents, while long-term-care homes that fail to comply with regulations will face consequences.

This is something that really underscores the commitment that this government has made to resident safety and care. We've hired twice as many inspectors. We increased the standards and set the penalties to some of the highest in North America to make sure that our seniors are being respected and treated with the care and dignity that they deserve when they're residents in long-term-care homes and retirement homes or receiving care in their homes in the community. In retirement homes, amendments will grant the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility greater authority to issue directives aimed at preventing and managing infectious diseases and safeguarding the health of residents.

Speaker, Ontario's population is aging rapidly. Over the next decade, we anticipate three million more residents in our province, with seniors representing the fastest-growing demographic cohort. This growth will place increased demands on our health care system and our communities.

The Support for Seniors and Caregivers Act, 2024, is our government's proactive response to these challenges. One of the things that really inspires me about the bill that we have before us today is the amount of truly elegant solutions that exist within it. This isn't a throw-money-at-the-problem campaign. It's not about how much we are spending. It's about what kind of impact that these solutions will actually have on residents, whether they're in the community, in retirement homes or in long-term care.

As referenced earlier, it really is the cumulative work of the experience and the abilities of three different ministries, including, of course, our great Minister of Long-Term Care, who previously had a career as a nurse and spent a lot of time in these settings. This is something that I think we can all be really proud of, because sometimes government works in a big way, but in this situation, we're making important, elegant changes that will have a huge impact for residents. I'm very proud to be up here today

just to be a part of that and sharing that news with the community.

1610

There are a couple of proposals I just want to highlight quickly, as I notice that time is waning here. Certainly, requiring all long-term-care homes to have a dementia program—that's something that 60% of our homes have right now. We're going to standardize that across the entire 620 homes in Ontario to make sure that every home is prepared to deal with the challenges of residents with dementia.

And then also having those staff trained in emotion-based care, which is so important to bring that personalized aspect to it—because sometimes in the aim of efficiency, we lose out on some of the effectiveness. If everyone eats breakfast at 7 o'clock, what if throughout your life, you weren't a breakfast person, but you needed something more around 10:30, kind of like myself? That's something that we want to make sure is built into this so we're caring for people in a way that is conducive to their health and based on their personal needs.

Also, looking at the cultural and linguistic programs that we're proposing for all long-term-care homes: As we know, when people age and when they start to struggle with dementia, often they revert back to their mother language. Being able to make sure homes are prepared for that and can communicate with people in the way that they need to be communicated with, once again, makes that home in long-term care feel more like a home and makes sure that individual is supported in the way that they need to be.

Caring for our seniors is not always easy. It requires patience, compassion and dedication, but it is also a moral obligation. The strong, resilient individuals who built Ontario for us, raised and nurtured our families, now depend on us to take care of them. This legislation and its accompanying investments reflect our belief that every senior in Ontario deserves to age with dignity, independence and the knowledge that they are valued members of our society.

I urge all members of this Legislature to support this important work. Together, we can provide Ontario's seniors with the care and protections that they need and deserve.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you to the member. I'm glad that you brought up retirement homes because I don't think people understand how many people are living in retirement homes, and they are continuing to be sicker and more frail. They do not have the kinds of protection that they deserve, and those protections are not in this bill.

For example, if you live in a retirement home, there's no rent control. These for-profit, large corporations like Chartwell and Revera can increase the service fees as much as they want. There's also no protection from being evicted. Imagine that. You're a senior; you think this is where you're going to end your years. You are in a retirement home, and you're being evicted because this for-profit corporation would make more money selling the

property and building a building than they would looking after seniors. These corporations make billions and the CEOs make millions. This all comes from profit, and at the same time, they don't have protections and oversight.

Can you explain why you have a bill here that says that you're going to fix the Retirement Homes Act, and you do nothing to ensure that people are not faced with extraordinary increases and evictions?

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Thank you very much to the member for the question.

I think that we all recognize the need to take care of our seniors wherever they may be, whether that's in long-term care, whether that's in a retirement residence or whether that's at home in the community. Certainly, there are some significant protections for people living in retirement homes in this bill, including delegating authority to MSAA for infection prevention measures and different controls like that.

This government has been very committed on cracking down on companies that are exploitative to seniors, and we will continue to do that because we recognize that their care is paramount and at these more vulnerable ages, where they get later on in life, we need to put that to the forefront. We will continue to do that while we also continue to build capacity, increase the access to care, as well as improving care for all the members, whether they are in a long-term-care home, a retirement home, or living in the community.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: With regard to funding for dementia training, I have a question for the member; it's for implementing emotion-based models of care with long-term-care homes. We think this is an important and essential step for improving the quality of life of residents who are suffering from dementia. Emotion-based care focuses on understanding and addressing the emotional needs of individuals, fostering meaningful connections and enhancing their overall well-being.

If new dementia-specific funding is approved, will the member please give us some information on how these funds might be allocated to the various providers? Will there be some kind of formula for distributing that money? Will there be some kind of prioritization? How will the ministry ensure or try to encourage that various homes across the province all have an equal opportunity to apply for that funding? Give us an idea of what this is going to look like.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Thank you to the member from Essex for that question.

If new funding for dementia training is approved, the Ministry of Long-Term Care would evaluate several potential delivery methods and options for administering that program. These options include engaging the Ontario Centres for Learning, Research and Innovation in Long-Term Care. CLRIs are experienced in delivering similar programs for the ministry and are equipped with strong program-evaluation capabilities. We would also look at utilizing an existing ministry funding stream. For example,

the Local Priorities Fund could serve as a mechanism for delivering this program.

The proposed initiative is designed as a grant program to provide funding to up to 15 long-term-care homes for implementing emotion-based care models, including staff training and education. Funding decisions would consider several factors including a home's readiness to implement the proposed model, the regional diversity, and the home size and ownership type to ensure equity and inclusivity. While the government does not endorse one specific model, several proprietary emotion-based care models have shown positive results for residents with dementia in long-term-care settings. We are always focused on enhancing the quality of life for residents living with dementia.

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

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Bay of Quinte and the parliamentary assistant as well for his debate on this—relatively new as an MPP but a PA already.

Before I was elected, the member for Nickel Belt and I went to visit this family who were separated. The wife was in one institution and the husband was in another one and they couldn't get together, even though they'd been married and sharing a bed for most of their adult lives. I know that the member from Waterloo has a bill called the Till Death Do Us Part Act that ensures married couples are reunited when they're in long-term care. I don't believe this is in the bill. As the PA, if you're fixing this, why can't we fix this very simple thing? I think we all agree that we want people who have been together their whole adult lives be able to retire together.

When will that be coming in the bill, and if we put forward an amendment, would you support that amendment?

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Thank you very much to the member for the question. Certainly, that is a priority under the current system. Any home that has long-stay beds does have the ability to do reconnections and partner reconnections. The challenge with the bill that was put forward—I know the one that you're referencing—is that it is very well intended, but there are unintended consequences.

Those consequences would include prioritizing people based on their spouse being in long-term care instead of based on the acuity of the needs that they're struggling with. In a situation like that, higher-acuity-needs people would be bumped down the list in order to promote spousal reunification as the number one priority. I think that as we all recognize the challenges of living apart from your spouse, particularly after that amount of time together if we're talking about senior couples who have been together a long time, we have to prioritize and put to the forefront the acuity of the need to make sure that people who are struggling the most are getting priority access to long-term care.

That has been our position and will continue to be our position, but we are always looking for new ways to create more opportunities for spousal reunification where we can.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Earlier today, when I spoke on Bill 235, I spent a little bit of time talking about some of the proposed changes to retirement homes and in particular, the retirement home Residents' Bill of Rights. I'd like the member opposite, if he could, to spend a little bit of time talking about the changes to the retirement home Residents' Bill of Rights and what that will affect within retirement homes across Ontario.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Thank you to the great member for the question.

This proposal responds directly to issues that were highlighted in the Auditor General's 2020 review of the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority, which underscored key challenges faced by residents in accessing family members and friends who provide essential informal care. Our proposal before the House today is to amend the RHA, the residents' bill of rights act, to explicitly reinforce residents' rights to access family members and friends. This will directly address the loneliness epidemic that is impacting Ontario's senior population. As was referenced earlier, loneliness and isolation are public enemy number one for our seniors.

Through initial consultations, stakeholders validated this approach, agreeing that such amendments would enhance resident health and well-being, particularly for individuals living with dementia or those reliant on informal care, and build on existing practices without imposing significant additional costs on retirement home operators.

This initiative ensures that retirement home residents maintain vital connections with their support networks, safeguarding their dignity and quality of life.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I want to thank the member for his passionate speech and his kind words about the elderly and seniors.

I've often reflected, too, about the institutional feel of many of the long-term-care facilities. I've seen where LTC facilities will actually do things to brighten it and make it very personalized, and it's really beautiful.

Long-term care is something we've all been discussing over the years. On this side of the House, I've reflected and noted that, relatively speaking and all things being equal, public long-term-care facilities tend to have better outcomes. Do you have any thoughts or comments about that?

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Thank you to the member for the question.

I certainly agree that by deinstitutionalizing the setting, it helps provide that better emotional care for residents—including being able to find their way around the homes better, and just having that more home-like feel.

As it relates to the second portion of your question—can you remind me what the second portion of this question was?

Interjection.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Oh, yes.

As I stated earlier, we have quite a mandate in long-term care to build and redevelop 58,000 units across Ontario, and we're looking to grow in whichever models are most susceptible to being able to facilitate that. Whether that's municipal-owned homes, whether that's private homes, or some combination therein—we're looking to grow capacity everywhere. We will certainly be looking to support organizations that have continued to deliver good results, that are keeping up with the care demands and that are in good financial positions.

But really, we're focused on growth everywhere, and that will require every aspect of that long-term-care continuum.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: It's a pleasure for me to say a few words about the Support for Seniors and Caregivers Act, put forward by the Minister of Long-Term Care, who is also a good friend of mine. We have been together on the APF and other activities, travelled all over the world, and I very much appreciate how much she cares for people and the patients she cared for when she worked as a nurse.

The bill is called Support for Seniors and Caregivers Act. The bill has basically four parts to it, but the first part deals with changes to the Fixing Long-Term Care Act, where we would see programs to meet the cultural, linguistic, religious and spiritual needs of residents.

This is something—everybody knows I'm francophone—that the francophone population has been asking for, for a long time. There are very few French-language-designated long-term-care homes. To require programming is not exactly what the francophone population had been asking for. The francophone populations wanted designated long-term-care homes, where you knew that, 24/7, there were going to be French services available to you through the staff, through the cultural events, through the activities, through everybody who cared for you.

It's a step in the right direction to require that they have programs that meet the cultural, linguistic, and religious and spiritual needs of the residents. It certainly brings it closer to quality care, but I would say there are some bigger steps that could have been taken to continue in that direction, and that's to have designated homes. The homes do not all have to be big 133-bed, 128-bed long-term-care homes. There are many models where you look at small homes—homes with eight beds, homes with 10 beds—that you can bring into northern and rural communities, and that bring long-term levels of care to a smaller community, where you're able to stay with your loved one and you're able to be more connected to your cultural background, to your religion, to the food you like to eat, the celebrations you like to participate in and the people you grew up with.

None of that is in the bill, but I'm putting it out there, so that as we continue down this path, we make it to a point where we can guarantee that the language will be respected. It doesn't only have to be for French. The member for Kiiwetinoong made it clear that speaking the three First

Nations languages that are used in his riding would make a big difference to people needing long-term-care.

The next big thing from the Fixing Long-Term Care Act that will be modified is that the clinical director will now be able to be a nurse practitioner. During COVID, in every long-term-care home—I've forgotten: 654 long-term-care homes; 78,000 long-term-care-home residents. They all have a medical director—this will be changed to a clinical director. The clinical director will not have to be a physician. They could certainly be a physician. They can also be a nurse practitioner. This is something that was trialled in Ontario during the pandemic, and it was very successful.

What we envision and hope will happen is that the nurse practitioners will have full-time jobs working in the homes. Quality of care is directly linked to continuity of care. If you have somebody there who knows all of the residents, who establishes a relationship with all of the residents, it certainly helps improve the quality of care that will be delivered. This will become more available and accessible. It will also make it easier for some of the smaller homes in northern and rural Ontario, where I am from, to be able to have a clinical director on a permanent basis.

Section 8 deals directly with the use of psychotropic drugs in long-term care, which are used way, way too often to treat mood disorders and mental illness. The Alzheimer Society, the College of Physicians and Surgeons—even the Auditor General, the last time she did her report on long-term care, noticed that this had to change. Those medications are used very often in long-term care. Most of the time, it's because the resident is not receiving the level of care that they need and they act out. When a 75-year-old man with advanced cognitive impairment, whether it be dementia or Alzheimer's or whatever, acts out, they can harm a lot of frail elderly people in their surroundings. We have behavioural therapy, but if the staff is too busy, if there isn't enough staff to make that therapy available, then the default is to put them on drugs. This default of putting them on drugs comes with a ton of side effects. It is not good, quality care. It is not how we should handle behaviours in long-term care. We know how to do better, but the staff complement is never enough to meet the needs—that means that physician in charge goes to using psychotropic drugs. I'm happy to see that section 8 deals with that directly. It is something that has been needed for a very long time.

Then, we talked about the Retirement Homes Act. We, the NDP, voted against the Retirement Homes Act. I would vote against it again if it was in front of me. Frail elderly people live in our retirement homes, and we're leaving it to the industry to self-regulate. Who thinks that this is a good idea? The industry is there to make money, and they make a ton of money. I can talk about my in-laws who rented a 325-square-foot apartment in a long-term-care home and paid \$5,500 a month. Why? Because they are a self-regulated industry.

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The government has a role to play. We have to protect those frail, elderly people. They are vulnerable. They need our protection. The Retirement Homes Act does not do this. It will now do one little thing, and that is amend the Retirement Homes Act, the Residents' Bill of Rights, so ongoing support from caregivers in retirement homes will be included in the Residents' Bill of Rights.

What happens right now is that if your caregiver—usually it's your spouse, your child, your neighbour—comes on a regular basis and is not happy with what the retirement home is doing and starts to complain, then the retirement home says, "You are not allowed to come in here anymore." They will say, "Our staff deserve to be in a safe place" and use all sorts of laws that protect them, to tell the caregiver that they are no longer allowed in. This will help. Don't get me wrong. I don't want any workers to get harassed. I don't want any workers to face any kind of bad behaviour while they're working. At the same time, I know full well that oftentimes it is not because of bad behaviour; it is because the caregiver is advocating for their loved one, who pays \$3,000, \$4,000 a month to be served something other than a sandwich for lunch. They don't like sandwiches and they don't like white bread, but every day, at lunch, they get the same white bread sandwich they don't like. Yet, they pay \$4,000 a month because lunch is included, because supper is included. But when lunch is something you don't like and supper is not that much better, and your caregiver says, "Enough is enough. The only choice has been a sandwich for the last 13 days. You say on your menu that you're supposed to have two or three choices. You don't respect any of this"—what happens? The caregiver is not allowed in. This will change that. This is something that I'm happy to see in the bill.

The next part is a bit weird, and I'm happy to find out more. Now the Ministry of Long-Term Care—and it's the deputy minister, the assistant deputy minister, the program supervisor, a whole bunch of people, anyway, within the Ministry of Long-Term Care—will be able to issue recommendations regarding infectious diseases. This is weird because none of the senior ministry officials are part of public health. We have public health that deals with infectious diseases in congregate settings such as retirement homes. I don't know why this has been put in, but I would like to find out more. I'm not opposed to this, I just want to better understand why we want to put that in. It is certainly not clear that it was something that was wanted or needed.

The next thing is, the government—it is not in the bill, but when they announced the bill, they also announced a \$114-million investment to implement a dementia program and enforcement capacity. Remember, I said one of the first things is that every long-term-care home will have to have a dementia strategy. I don't know if you knew this, Speaker, but 90% of the 78,000 residents of our long-term-care homes have cognitive impairment; of those, two thirds have dementia, and another third have a diagnosis of Alzheimer's. So is this something that is needed in

every long-term-care home? Yes, yes, absolutely. Of the \$114 million, there will be \$9 million going to the Alzheimer Society for their First Link program.

I don't know if you know the First Link program of the Alzheimer Society, but it is really, really good. It is a program that focuses on early intervention. They offer one-on-one support. They offer education. They offer to connect you with other people who are living through the same thing. They offer different support groups. The support group could be people in your neighbourhood or people who speak your language or people from the same culture as you. Getting a diagnosis of dementia or Alzheimer's is very, very scary. There are very few treatments for dementia and Alzheimer's, but they are more and more knowledgeable about the disease—more and more ways to slow the disease. The Alzheimer Society knows all of that, makes that available in a way that is easy for people to understand—to take the fear away and focus on how I can stay as cognitively ready as I can for as long as I can. This is something that had been in need of funding for a long time. The demand for it is huge. The money for it is very small. Most of the money came from the Alzheimer Society doing fundraising to be able to offer this program. If the government goes through, of the \$144-million investment they've mentioned, \$9 million will go to the Alzheimer Society. I think it will help a lot of people who go through the transition of being diagnosed with, as I said, cognitive impairment, dementia or Alzheimer's. The Alzheimer Society does not only take families who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. If you have any type of dementia, they will also welcome you.

There's another \$6 million that is going to GeriMedRisk. Again, this is a good program. It is a program that is available to health care professionals. If you work in a long-term-care home, if you work in a retirement home or even in home care and you work with frail, elderly people, you can phone GeriMedRisk—I don't know why it's called that—and there's a team of people there who are specialized. They know all of the drugs—they know, because often you will want to try the new drugs to help with Alzheimer's or with dementia, but they're already on a series of drugs, and you're not too sure. There are very good pharmacists who are there; there are physicians; there are nurses; there are social workers. They do a whole lot about mental health also—how do you handle mental illness with somebody who has a cognitive impairment, dementia or Alzheimer's etc.? This is a very good program. Again, the \$6 million to make this program more available, better known and more responsive for more hours, more days etc., is something that will help, I would say, especially in rural areas and in northern areas, where I serve, where you may not have that many people being diagnosed with a very specific type of right lobe dementia or something that you haven't seen very often. You call those people; they know it all—they know the medicine, they know how to care for mental health, and they help out. So I'm quite happy that they will be getting a little bit of funding.

Then, there's a severe punishment and penalty for failure to maintain proper records. I couldn't help but laugh a little bit when I read that, because I'm thinking maybe they should learn from their own bill—because apparently there are people on the Conservative side who have a hard time maintaining records, according to the RCMP and according to the Auditor General. But there will be strong—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Especially phone records.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yes, phone records are really hard to keep.

But there will be strong penalties if a long-term-care home fails to maintain proper records, which is always very important.

This is what's in the bill. I'm happy with what's in there. As I say, I have a few flags, but nothing severe enough—but there are many, many other things I would have liked to see. I would have liked to see more of a push towards four hours of hands-on care. I tabled that bill in 2016. We debated it way back, close to nine years ago, and we're still not there. The government has set some targets towards 4.1 hours of hands-on care, and they're not meeting any of those targets. We all know we're short 13,000 nurses and 37,000 PSWs in long-term care. We have a long way to go.

I also would have liked to see what I call making PSW a career. Right now, there is a ton of agency nursing making a ton of money off of our long-term-care homes because they cannot recruit and retain a stable workforce. I have put forward a bill to limit the use of agency nursing in long-term care. It was voted against by this government, but you should really think about it because even other provinces governed by Conservative governments are putting forward limits. Ask the government of Saskatchewan, who have shown the door to Extencicare and said, "No more of that." There are no more for-profit long-term-care homes in Saskatchewan, under a Conservative government, and limits on the amount of for-profit agency nursing that are being used in long-term care.

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Making PSW a career would change everything. If you were to give a PSW a permanent, full-time job, well paid, with benefits, holidays, sick pay and a pension plan and a workload that a human being can handle—there are lots and lots of people who want to care for others, who would be excellent PSWs, but if they work as a PSW, they cannot pay the rent and feed their kids. Let's change this. Let's make a PSW a career that gets you a salary, that allows you to live and care for the people who need the care. The challenges that we have with the 37,000 needed PSWs would go away.

I can talk about my community. When the hospital puts out one job for a PSW, they get about 500 people from Sudbury who apply. Those are 500 PSWs who do not work as a PSW, because the jobs in long-term care and home care do not pay the bills and the rent. So all of this could change. None of that is in the bill.

In Orchard Villa, the place where the great majority of people got COVID—over half of the people died, and they

still got a 30-year extension on their licence, plus money to build more beds. That's supposed to be against the law that exists right now, but the government is ignoring their own law.

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

M. Anthony Leardi: J'aimerais poser une question sur la difficulté des procurations. Souvent, des gens ont une procuration de santé, et ce sont des gens qui sont pris avec la responsabilité de prendre soin d'un individu qui est résident dans une résidence à long terme.

Souvent, ces gens estiment que, dans leur opinion, c'est pour la protection de la personne qui réside dans la résidence à long terme de protéger cette personne contre des problèmes à l'extérieur. Donc, ils demandent à la résidence de ne pas laisser entrer une personne spécifique, et c'est une personne avec le droit légal de faire cela. J'aimerais inviter la députée à parler de ce problème.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Malheureusement, ce dont le membre nous parle est réel. Pas toutes les familles s'entendent bien. Pas toutes les familles veulent s'entraider, et ce n'est pas parce que tu deviens plus âgé que tu perds l'habileté de décider pour toi-même qui tu veux voir et qui tu ne veux pas voir.

Dans les maisons de soins de longue durée, ils vont respecter les décisions de la personne qui est là, sauf lorsque la personne a été évaluée et qu'on lui a enlevé son droit de décider. L'exemple que le membre nous donne, oui, absolument. Si tu ne t'es jamais bien entendu avec ta deuxième fille, et là, elle veut commencer à venir te voir, tu as le droit de dire à la maison de soins de longue durée que tu ne veux pas la voir.

La Présidente suppléante (M^{me} Lucille Collard): La prochaine question? Next question?

MPP Wayne Gates: There's nothing in this bill that apologizes for the 6,000 seniors who died during COVID, and that's unfortunate.

But the NDP has tried to help this government over a number of years. Why do you think the Conservatives, including the minister, voted no to MPP Fife's bill, Till Death Do Us Part? Voula's Law in 2021: They voted no. The More Than a Visitor Act, from MPP Gretzky: They voted no. One that I just put out in May, and it's right in this bill when it talks about caregivers: my caregiver motion that would have given caregivers—where we have 3.4 million caregivers in the province of Ontario—direct financial support, just like they already do in Nova Scotia. Why do you think they would turn that down, including the minister?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would say, if I take them one by one, if I take Till Death Do Us Part right now—when you are in need of long-term care, you are put on a priority. If your spouse is in one long-term care and the other is in the other long-term care, you will never be on the emergency list. Right now, in Ontario, with 48,000 people waiting for one of those 78,000 beds, only people on the emergency list ever get moved. Because you're safe and you have somebody that feeds you, you're not in an emergency; you will never be moved.

This is wrong. Those people have a right to stay together, and we should respect this. There is a bill right here on the docket that we should vote for—the same thing with the bill that the member brought forward about giving small monetary support to caregivers. That would make a world of difference to so, so many families who would love to look after their mom, their dad, their cousin, their spouse, but can't.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I would like to focus on the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority and what happens in retirement homes. The member from Niagara Falls talked about all the bills that we put forward that would have supported seniors—the caregivers bill, Till Death Do Us Part. I also put forward a bill that would look at the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority coming under the government's purview, because—as you know and you can explain—right now, this is a self-governed body. They appoint their own directors. They appoint their own salaries. It's a fully self-governed body, and it begs the question, how do they manage conflicts of interest?

People that go into retirement homes often don't understand that they have very few rights that are protected under this government. Little by little, the things that they've worked for all their lives, the savings that they've had all their lives, are slowly taken away by for-profit corporations for things that they may or may not understand, charges they might not understand or things that they may not need.

Can you explain why the government needs to step up, do the right thing and make sure people living in retirement homes have adequate protection?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I couldn't agree more. We voted against that bill. The NDP voted against the bill when it first came out, and I would vote against it again. You cannot put a for-profit-dominated agency in charge of frail elderly people. Vulnerable frail elderly people need government protection. That's why we exist. You cannot leave the different providers—many of them are big corporations based in the States that have a bunch of homes in Ontario because we allow them to do this, and then their number one priority is to make money. There's nothing wrong with making money, but not off the backs of frail elderly people who need our protection.

We have been pushing for the government—you have to have oversight. There are problems coming from retirement homes non-stop, but they're not going to be fixed by the industry that benefits from their actions.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Speaker, you'll know that the legislation speaks about expanding the Seniors Active Living Centres Program by adding 100 new centres by 2025-26. Speaking about it this morning, I described it as a forward-thinking initiative, because the expansion not only enhances access to vital services for seniors but also alleviates future pressures—some of which the member opposite spoke about—on Ontario's health care system.

Can we expect, in further debate on this particular bill, that the member opposite will be supporting a plan that directly affects the benefits seniors so richly deserve?

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M^{me} France Gélinas: We very seldom talk about health promotion and disease prevention in this place, but active living centres are just that. Active living centres allow you to stay physically active, to stay emotionally connected, to stay socially connected, to make sure that if you don't have a car, there is somebody who will help and bring you there. They do fantastic work, and we have measured the difference between a frail, elderly person who connects to those centres versus the same level of care who doesn't. We do way better. We are human beings. No matter what age we're at, we need to be socially connected, we need to be physically active, we need to be stimulated mentally, and those centres do all that. They should be available to every Ontarian who needs them. I would encourage, if you have one in your neighbourhood, to encourage people to go.

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

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member for Nickel Belt, as well. Very brief time on the clock, so I know the government has talked about attracting PSWs into this field, but we know that PSWs are exiting on a regular basis. When I visited a long-term-care home, for example, there was a PSW who was cleaning the long-term-care home because it paid better than being a PSW. What should we be doing to ensure that we keep PSWs in the place that they care for the people who are there? As one family member said, PSWs are family when family's not there. How do we ensure that PSWs can be family when family is not there?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Treat PSWs like every other essential worker. Give them permanent, full-time employment. Give them vacation days, sick days. Give them benefits. Give them pension plans. Give them a workload that a human being can handle. And you will see that the tens of thousands of people who want to be a PSW, who want those jobs, who went to school to do those jobs but cannot—because if you work as a PSW in Ontario right now, you cannot pay the rent and feed your kids. It's as simple as that.

Make PSW a career. There are lots of people who want to do that kind of work, who want to care for your grandmother or your spouse in their time of need. But they need to be paid, and they need to be respected, and right now in Ontario, they are not.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure and an honour to join this debate here on Bill 235, and I want to thank the Minister of Long-Term Care for bringing this legislation forward. I understand that the opposition is going to be supporting this legislation, which is good. I also hear from the member for Niagara Falls, who always focuses on what he doesn't see in the bill, that we don't want these bills to be requiring a tractor-trailer to drive the bill into the Legislature.

Where this is the most progressive, will improve the lot of seniors in this province more than any other previous piece of legislation—and that is a fact. And I want to thank the member for Nickel Belt; her speech earlier today did talk a lot about the positive aspects of this bill. I don't always agree with the member for Nickel Belt, but I do respect her passion and her commitment to the things she believes in. So when she stands up and speaks about the positive aspects of that bill, I really appreciate that, because she sees that there are things happening in this piece of legislation that are going to be tremendously beneficial to our seniors in long-term care, retirement homes and elsewhere.

I'm going to go back a little bit. I've been around for a while, and I can remember when there was no long-term-care home in my neck of the woods in Barry's Bay. I was reading the venerable Eganville Leader a couple of weeks ago, a publication of 122 years of age—a great publication, a tremendous weekly newspaper. There was an article in there from November 25, 1949. I think the number is actually staggering to see how people felt and how important this new way of treating and protecting and caring for our seniors, and how important it was viewed by the citizens. So in the early months of 1949, Bishop William Smith—who, by the way, delivered the eulogy at my mother's funeral in 1974. Bishop Smith started a campaign in the Pembroke Diocese to raise money to begin to put money towards two homes for the aged—what they were called then. One was going to be in Pembroke, and one was going to be on the Quebec side of the Ottawa River, which is still part of the Pembroke Diocese. And in less than six months, it was reported in the Eganville Leader that the bishop's campaign had raised \$621,496. This is in 1949.

Just to put it into perspective: The hospital in Barry's Bay that opened in 1960 was built for a little over \$200,000, if I recall—I wasn't there for the building; I was living, but around \$200,000 built the hospital. He raised \$621,496 to put towards two homes for the aged. Now, incidentally, that hospital in Barry's Bay just went out for tenders to redevelop the emergency room facilities at the hospital, supported almost completely by this government, to the tune of over \$20 million, provincial money, going to that redevelopment, at that hospital that cost a couple hundred thousand dollars to build in the late 1950s, opened in 1960. So that just puts it into perspective, the value of the money at that time.

I might actually point out—do I only have 10 minutes?

Interjections: Yes.

Hon. Nina Tangri: Five and a half.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, Yes, I better get to it.

I might actually point out that in that edition of the Eganville Leader, there was also a story of Dr. J.J. McCann, who was the member of Parliament at that time. They were at a Remembrance Day banquet in Renfrew, and Charlotte Whitton, the future mayor—Speaker, you would know very well of the reputation of the great Charlotte Whitton, who was the future mayor of Ottawa. She was the guest speaker.

It was noted in that edition of the Eganville Leader that the federal government in 1949, over 16% of its budget was dedicated to national defence. Perhaps our federal government today could take a lesson for that.

But I want to say, too, about that great Eganville Leader, it has missed four editions because of the postal strike. And this is a message to the federal government as well: Our weekly newspapers, rural newspapers—and I know many of my colleagues would have a rural newspaper in their ridings—depend on Canada Post to get those papers delivered. This venerable publication, which has been publishing non-stop for 122 years, is in jeopardy of closing. These are the kinds of things we can read in there that take you back in time as well. In jeopardy of closing because of the postal strike—and that would be an absolute tragedy should that happen. But all of our weekly newspapers are in trouble because of the postal strike, because they can't print because they can't get it delivered. And if you can't print, you don't have any revenue, because your revenue primarily comes from your advertising.

Boy, I thought I had 20 minutes to speak here. I didn't realize we were being cut short. There is so much in this bill that I'm not going to be able to cover it all.

I heard my colleague from Bay of Quinte talking about the programs for Alzheimer's and dementia. How could it be more timely than to be bringing in legislation that is going to protect and serve our aging seniors that are suffering from dementia, the generation that we owe our success to? We are facing a tsunami of dementia. Not just in Ontario but all across North America, the baby boomers are now reaching that age. The early ones in the baby boomers are now moving into that demographic. For about 18 years, the population growth was huge. That group of citizens is going to, in a very huge way, dramatically change the average age in this country and in this province. To have services and help available for those with dementia and Alzheimer's is absolutely critical. This is a very important step that we're taking here in this regard. This is huge.

1700

I don't have much time left, so I do want to talk about the seniors active living centres, as well. I heard my colleague from Nickel Belt talking about them, as well. I have 10 SALCs in my riding and I'm getting more. I know it because we are very, very proactive in pushing for those seniors active living centres. For people who know my riding, I've got a number of communities that are singularly nuclear amongst themselves, but they're spread out, so you can't expect people from Eganville to go to a seniors active living centre in Pembroke. They're seniors—they don't want to drive distances—so this is a tremendous program.

To be bringing in 100 more seniors active living centres—I've just got to say to Minister Cho, the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility, I don't think we could have found anybody who understands more the importance of seniors being socially engaged. One of the most important determinants of health is avoiding isolation as you get

older, and that's one of the things that for years we weren't focusing on. But the more you can be involved with others, that will be a positive step on your personal health as you age. So more seniors active living centres, 100%—a hundred of them, and 100% support for that. This is a tremendous program.

Of course, I'm supporting the bill. I wish I had more time. I didn't realize I was only getting half a slot here today. There's much more to say, but I just want to say thank you to the minister. This is a great piece of legislation and a tremendously positive step forward for seniors.

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

MPP Wayne Gates: The member shouldn't have wasted so much time talking about—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Sorry. I jumped ahead of myself.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: He knows it's questions.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I'm sorry. Yes, I'm going to questions first. I didn't mean to skip that. We're moving to questions. Do you have a question?

MPP Wayne Gates: That's what I was doing.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Okay. I'm sorry.

MPP Wayne Gates: It's all good.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): You go, member for Niagara Falls.

MPP Wayne Gates: Listen, I'm getting on TV and it's all free. It's perfect.

Interjection: Speak to the bill.

MPP Wayne Gates: I'll try.

Why do you think the Conservatives and the minister voted no to MPP Fife's bill Till Death Do Us Part? Why did you vote no on Voula's Law, 2021, which was going to help seniors, and MPP Gretzky's More than a Visitor Act, which would have allowed visitors to go into the homes?

I brought forward a motion, just six months ago, that would give direct compensation to caregivers, like Nova Scotia. It says right in the top of the bill, if I'm correct, "Caregivers Act." So why wouldn't you support them financially as well?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, I heard the member say, why am I wasting my time talking about him? I don't consider it a waste of time, but he must consider it a waste of time.

But I just want to say, look, we are doing, as I said, more positive things for seniors in this bill. I would encourage the member: If you want to see your bills get passed and you want to dictate what legislation get passed in this chamber, you're going to need to elect more members. You're going to have to sit on this side of the House. You'll have an opportunity in the future. You'll have an opportunity.

We went to the people in 2022 and were re-elected with a bigger majority. We're going to have another bigger majority next time there's an election. If you don't like what's happening on this side of the House, you're going to have to get re-elected and win the government. But I'm

afraid with what you people are doing every day over there, you have no chance of being elected government in Ontario.

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

Interjection.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: It's always a pleasure to hear my friend from Renfrew debate. I remember about 20 years ago, I attended, I think, what was his first public announcement as an MPP when the Liberal government of the day was announcing the expansion of Highway 417 out towards Arnprior I think was the first leg of it, and then Renfrew.

Given his loquacious debating style, I'm wondering if the member from Renfrew would be willing to give us another minute about some of the important things for seniors that are in this bill.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much to the member from Orléans. I very much appreciate that.

One of the things that we are talking about is the work we're doing for people suffering from dementia. It's absolutely critical, and I have a number—I've got to get my glasses, though, because there's some numbers here: It's about \$80 million.

There's a number of ongoing dementia investments in the Alzheimer Society's First Link program—that's \$9 million over three years; dementia investments in GeriMedRisk, the Ministry of Health—\$6 million over three years, but a total community access to long-term care—\$15 million over two years; respite services—\$20 million over three years. There's about \$80 million that is coming forward. It is absolutely great news for seniors.

We're not pretending that we're going to solve all of the problems in one bill, but this bill goes a long way to getting us there.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker. I was a little bit too eager the first time to get up and ask a question.

I know my colleague to my left has retirement homes in his riding, and this particular legislation has revisions to the retirement homes Residents' Bill of Rights to reinforce residents' ability to access their loved ones. I'd like him to talk a little bit more about how the retirement homes Residents' Bill of Rights and the changes that we're making are going to ensure that residents' rights will be better connected and protected while balancing the operational considerations of retirement homes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member for Whitby for that question and, through you, Speaker, to the member: It's a very important question.

The proposals respond directly to issues highlighted in the Auditor General's 2020 review of the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority, which underscored key challenges faced by residents in accessing family members and friends who provide essential informal care. The member for—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Nickel Belt.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Nickel Belt—thank you—spoke to that as well earlier.

Our proposal before the House is to amend the Retirement Homes Act, the Residents' Bill of Rights to explicitly reinforce residents' rights to access family members and friends. This will directly address the loneliness epidemic that is impacting Ontario's senior population.

Speaker, to have a loved one have more access to their loved one at or in a retirement home or anywhere is of absolutely paramount importance. We see that in all of our rural homes. The ability for those family members to interact with, help with feeding, different kinds of things that they help their loved one with is priceless, and this is going to entrench that even more.

By the way, I said \$80 million in funding—it's \$114 million that we've got in this bill.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: In order for what's in the bill to be able to be implemented, whether we look at dementia care, whether we look at culturally specific homes etc., you need workers. Most of the workers in long-term care are PSWs.

Does the member agree that to make PSW a career, where we give them permanent, full-time employment, well paid—with benefits, with sick days, with vacation days, with a pension plan—would help to make sure that we have enough staff available to meet the needs of existing long-term-care residents, as well as the new schedule that will bring dementia care and culturally appropriate care to the residents of long-term care—make PSW a career? Do you agree?

1710

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you to the member from Nickel Belt for that question.

It is something that we have recognized since the years of the pandemic—the important work that our PSWs do; the absolutely essential work that they do in our long-term-care homes, in our hospitals, in our retirement homes, and wherever they are providing that essential care. We took measures during the pandemic and since to significantly enhance the compensation and the conditions that PSWs work under. We've raised their wages. We gave them retention bonuses—all kinds of different things.

I understand the member from Nickel Belt. She has a view that there should be more, and there could always be more—doesn't matter what kind of work you're doing. When we see that the federal government has brought on such inflation these last couple of years, everybody is struggling. But we have taken many steps to enhance the working conditions of PSWs in this province, including those in long-term care. Is there more improvement that could be made at some point? It's not in this bill, but our government is always looking for ways to protect and enhance workers—

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: My colleague, in his presentation, didn't really have a lot of time to talk about the Seniors Active Living Centres Program and the changes that are proposed in this legislation, so I want to give him a little bit more time to explain how this expansion is going to directly affect his riding and to talk a little bit more specifically about the money that we have invested in the expansion.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member for Whitby.

Yes, I did mention I have 10 of these SALCs in my riding and I've been in every one of them. I'll tell you, the amazing impact that these seniors active living centres have on the people that visit them, participate in activities—it really is life-changing for so many of them because, without those SALCs, many of them were suffering from isolation at home. They may have been married and one of the members of the marriage has passed away. They're just not getting out of the home like they should or could, and we bring a SALC into that community and it's like, overnight, people are getting involved. They're doing crafts. They're associating with others, many of them that are kind of in the same boat, as they say. But the impact that they have on the positivity of people's lives cannot be overstated.

This is a great program, and I want to thank the minister for continuing to expand it.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to go to further debate. I recognize the member for Niagara Falls.

Interjections.

MPP Wayne Gates: I really appreciate that, yes. I appreciate the applause from the other side.

My colleague is just sitting here—I mentioned four bills that I think were so important for seniors and people who are in long-term-care and retirement homes—the Time to Care Act bill, France actually brought that bill forward in April 2016, and you know who voted against it? The Conservatives.

But she didn't get discouraged. She brought it forward again in October 2017: Bill 188, which gives you four hours of hands-on care for seniors. Guess who voted against it?

The leader of the NDP brought it forward in 2018; Teresa Armstrong, who is here, from London—July 2018; and Teresa Armstrong again—October 20, 2020. The Conservatives voted against it—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Every single time.

MPP Wayne Gates: Every single time—and what I'm saying when I stand up here and I say, “You know what? Sometimes, the opposition has a good idea.”

We know the PCs were the official opposition for 15 years, and through those 15 years, they voted against that bill every single time. Now, you can put on the back of a postage stamp what they accomplished in 15 years, but they were the opposition.

There's another one: Then my other colleague from Hamilton—let me get it right here—she had a bill: Retirement

Home Justice and Accountability. And again, you guys voted against it.

So when we stand up here and we bring motions or bills forward, we're not doing it just for the sake of doing it. We're doing it because we want to make it better for people that are in retirement homes—our moms or dads, our aunts or uncles, our brothers and sisters in retirement homes or long-term-care homes. Yet you guys continue to vote against it.

Today you've got a bill coming forward: “support for seniors.” I'm going back to bills that were eight years ago that you didn't support seniors. I'm going back to bills from 2020. The one I want to talk about—and I will say, and I'll be honest, there are some positive things in the bill. I won't get to them, but there are some positive things in the bill—because I've only got 10 minutes and not an hour. The one that really bothers me, and I've got to raise it, is MPP Fife's bill, Till Death Do Us Part. I brought that forward going back almost seven years ago. It was in Niagara West, I think it is—Sam Oosterhoff's riding. It was in his riding where they separated.

Now, think about this. You guys all have parents over there. You have moms. They were married for 60 years, and all they wanted to do was spend the last few months of their lives together in the same home. We'd been trying to get that passed, and I believe it was about eight years ago. My colleague from Kitchener has brought that bill up, and she's gone to this government and has begged the government, “Please pass that bill.” Because, you know what? When you love your spouse that much, you want to spend the last few months or the last year of your life together. I can't understand why you guys won't pass that bill. It drives me nuts. I don't think it's right. I think it's terrible, what they're doing.

But you know what else it affects? This is what they're not thinking about. So if my mom is in one home and my dad is in another home, and you have one family, how do you ever take care of the two of them? Because you're running from, say, St. Catharines to Grimsby. It makes no sense. The government, if they care about seniors—and that's what the bill is saying, that they care about seniors. I just gave you six bills and examples where we can make it better for seniors, and guess what they do? “Oh, no, we can't do that. We can't support seniors. No, we can't do that.” Well, it's wrong.

So I'm going to talk about some of the other things that we brought up—or we didn't bring it up; they brought up. This is the one that drives me nuts—and 10 minutes will go quick: Bill 7. How many of you remember Bill 7? You guys should remember. You guys all voted for it.

Interjection: The worst bill—the cruellest bill.

MPP Wayne Gates: It's one of the cruellest bills I've ever seen.

My mom is in a hospital, right? They bring in Bill 7, and they're allowed to send my mom from Niagara Falls to Hamilton—or, actually, all the way to Brantford. Now, think about that. Without consent, without the family's consent, they bring in a bill and say, “And if you don't go, we're going to charge your family \$400 a day.” We've had

people in Windsor refuse to pay, refuse to go. It's terrible. Here's what happens when you send them away—and in the north, by the way, just so I'm clear, it's even more than 150 kilometres you can send them away.

Again, who's the most important person in our lives, in most cases? Our moms, our dads, our aunts, our uncles, our brothers and sisters. So that family member can't go and see them. Because they're in Niagara Falls, they can't go and see them every day like they were. And I'll give you an example of that—I probably won't get to most of this stuff, but I'll give you an example of that.

My wife, whose mom and dad got sick—but her dad was first in a retirement home. It was five minutes from our house. My wife decided, as a principal, to retire to be with her dad. And you know what she did? Every single day she would go there at 7 o'clock in the morning. She helped feed him, get him dressed. Then she'd go back at lunch and have lunch with him. Then she'd go back at supper, make sure he's okay; make sure he's getting all his pills—right in Niagara Falls. It was maybe five minutes from our house, and she did that for years until her dad passed away. And then her mom got sick, and the same thing happened. She was put into a retirement home. Same thing: She'd go there every day.

The reason why I'm saying that is, under Bill 7, how do you do that if they force you out of the hospital and send you 150 kilometres away? My wife could have never done that with her dad and her mom: get up every day, be there to make sure he's getting his medicine, help him get dressed. It is a terrible, terrible bill. But yet today, in this bill, they're saying, "Oh, we care about seniors." Well, if you care about seniors, you should be standing up and saying, "Bill 7 was one of the worst bills that we've ever supported," because the minister supported that bill. She voted for it. There is so much more.

1720

How much time have I got? Three minutes. Okay. Let me get my glasses on.

My caregiver bill: It says in the bill—this drives me nuts. Let me read it out: "Support for Seniors and Caregivers Act." I brought forward a motion. It was in May. The motion said that we have 3.4 million caregivers in the province of Ontario—3.4 million—and a lot of those caregivers are putting in 20, 30, 40 hours to take care of their loved ones: again, their mom, their dad, maybe their brother, maybe their sister. And again, we put that motion forward, and what it was for was to say that they should be compensated for that time, because some of them are losing their jobs, because if you've got to choose between your job and your mom and dad—just like my wife's dad; she chose to retire—you're probably going to choose, but they should be compensated.

When people say, "Why? Why would we do that?" Now, think about it: We're the biggest, the richest province in Canada. I hear it all the time from the Premier. He tells me all the time: "We're the biggest. Everybody is running to Ontario." Yet a little place like Nova Scotia—how many of you have been to Nova Scotia? Has anybody here heard of Nova Scotia? They're supporting their

caregivers by giving them financial compensation, to help them take care of a loved one. We should be doing that here in the province. Guess who turned down that motion? Take a guess. Do any of the Conservatives want to guess? Everybody over there turned down that motion—absolutely disgraceful.

How much time have I got? A minute? What I would like to see from the Conservative government—and I've said this, because I've been the long-term-care critic for a long time. I've gone through five ministers. I would like to see somebody on that side stand up and say, "I'm sorry for what happened during COVID, when we lost 6,000 of our moms and dads or aunts and uncles or brothers and sisters." Somebody stand up and say, "Sorry. We could have done better. We could have made sure we had PPE. We could have made sure that we had enough PSWs to take care of your family members. We shouldn't have had to send in the military, because the care was so bad that people were dying from dehydration." But nobody has ever stood up and said, "Do you know what? We're sorry. We're sorry that happened to seniors"—nobody.

Do you know where most of them happened? In for-profit homes—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: They gave them immunity.

MPP Wayne Gates: Yes, and they can't even be sued, and neither can the government, because they brought in a bill to take care of that. Some 78% of seniors who died during COVID were in for-profit homes, and do you know why, Speaker? You're nodding your head. I know you want to know why. It's because it was about profit. It wasn't about care.

That's what we had to do. We have to establish that my life is important. It shouldn't be about how much money I can make when Wayne Gates goes into a long-term-care home—not that I'm saying I'm going to go any time soon, but I may. I think it—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We're out of time.

We're going to go to questions for the member. The member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much to the member from Niagara Falls. I know how passionate you are about seniors, and it shows, and the things that you talked about today just make common sense. But this government, time and time again, has voted down these bills that would have helped seniors, and now they come forward with a bill that shows, they say, how much they care about seniors and the respect of seniors, and it's pretty hard to take when you see their record when it comes to seniors.

Particularly, I want to talk, as you do, about Bill 7. It was called the More Beds, Better Care Act. I mean, "more beds"—it's right there. Let's get more beds. Let's get grandma out of the hospital as soon as we can. Right now, as you said, 400 people and counting were moved against their will, without their consent, to a home that was not of their choosing, and now this bill is being challenged in court because it's unconstitutional. You can't even imagine what could be more unconstitutional than taking sick, frail, elder people out of the home, threatening them

with financial ruin if they don't go. And this is a government that says now they care about seniors, but Bill 7—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I apologize. That's the time for the question.

I'm going to go to the member for Niagara Falls for a reply.

MPP Wayne Gates: I'm not really sure what the question was, but I certainly agree that Bill 7 was a terrible, terrible bill—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It's still standing.

MPP Wayne Gates: —and it's still there.

Think about it: Where did they send them? I'm going to tell you where they sent them. Most of the ones that were forced out of the hospital, those seniors, were sent to for-profit homes, the very same for-profit homes that had bad results—Orchard Villa, where they lost 71 people. In my area, we had people die in our long-term-care facilities and retirement homes. That's where they were sent.

They weren't sent to a not-for-profit, where they know they're going to get better care, or a regional home, where the outcomes are always better. No, they were trying to fill up, and the reason why Bill 7 came in—

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

MPP Wayne Gates: She wants me to be quiet? I'm good?

All right. Sorry. I'm good, I'm good.

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

Next question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: It's my understanding that the opposition objects to non-government-owned rest homes or long-term-care homes and that if it's not owned by the government, they object to that. That's my understanding of their position. I imagine that if they would like to purchase all of the non-government-owned rest homes and turn them into government-owned rest homes—and I was imagining what the cost of doing that would be.

So I would put this question to any member of the opposition and to the honourable member who just spoke: Has the NDP caucus ever, perhaps, made a financial calculation of what it might cost to purchase all of the currently non-government-run rest homes?

MPP Wayne Gates: I believe that the position of the party has been—I think it was even in our last platform—that we transition to not-for-profit and to regional homes.

But I'll tell you what we're not going to do: Orchard Villa killed 71 seniors in the province of Ontario, and do you know what you did? You rewarded them with a 30-year contract and millions of dollars to rebuild their facility. I'll tell you, we're not going to do that—I'll guarantee you—but that's what you've done.

Orchard Villa, without a doubt, was the worst. It's where the military was called in. It's where people were dying from dehydration, where there were cockroaches running around. They had no staff. They went in there—they had one staff member for the entire place. Some of those military guys and women, that went in there, are still off on PTSD because of what they saw that day and how seniors were being treated.

So that's the one thing we will not do: We won't reward bad actors who kill people in the province of Ontario—I will not do that.

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

MPP Jamie West: The member for Niagara Falls, in a bill that is called Support for Seniors and Caregivers Act, could only list things that have gone wrong with the Conservative government for seniors and caregivers in a 10-minute debate. I'm sure if he had the full 20, it could have been 20 minutes of things that were voted down or did not make lives better for seniors in long-term-care or retirement homes and for the caregivers who take care of them.

It isn't that this bill is filling in those gaps, that they have been listening to the advice that the people of Ontario were saying. They coloured around the edges on this. It's not that there's not some good stuff in here, but there are major things that we could fix.

I just want to know: To our critic on this bill, if you could pick two things that you would change out of things that you had there, what are the top two things that you would like to change that would actually provide support for seniors and caregivers?

MPP Wayne Gates: What I'd like to see happen in long-term-care and retirement homes is: They treat workers with respect and dignity and pay them properly. You shouldn't go to work at a full-time job and, because you're not being paid properly, when you get your cheque on Friday, the first stop is a food bank to take care of your family. That's the one thing I think we should absolutely have to do.

Then I've already talked about it—I don't believe that we need to have for-profit homes. We could transition to a not-for-profit so every single dollar that the government gives goes right back into care, care for my mom, care for my dad, care for my uncle, care for my brother and sister. Why can't we do that? Why is that such a big deal?

You know what? It was a Conservative government under Mike Harris that brought in for-profit home care, long-term care. You know what he said? "It's going to be better. You're going to have better results. Things are going to be better for you."

What we found out then and what we found out now: That was a big lie, and long-term care is in worse shape today than it's ever been.

1730

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: If I may return to the issue that I was talking to before, which was the NDP project to take over every non-government-owned rest home or long-term-care home in the province of Ontario. I suggested that would cost money and that, in order to take over those rest homes or long-term-care homes, you would have to pay people in order for them to transfer that property to the government, and there's a price tag on that.

And so, once again, I put to the NDP—any member of the NDP—and to the member who presented this evening:

What is the price tag of purchasing all of the non-government-owned long-term homes in the province of Ontario? Have they calculated a price tag? If they have calculated that price tag, I'd like to hear it.

MPP Wayne Gates: I'm glad you asked that question, because I'm going to put it right back on you, my colleague from Windsor area—

Interjections: Essex.

MPP Wayne Gates: —Windsor-Essex. What's the price tag you put on the 78% of the 6,000 people that died during COVID in a for-profit home because they didn't have PPE, because they didn't have staff? Do you not believe that every single dollar, our tax dollars—we all work hard here, but outside these four walls, they work extremely hard, and you don't think that they want their tax dollars to go for care and not profit?

I believe—and I believe this, because I've spoken at a lot of rallies, I've listened to them—they want every single penny of our health care dollars to go to a publicly funded, publicly delivered health care system, and a system in long-term care where it's about care and not about profit. And as long as you're going for profit, you're always going to have a problem in long-term care, because it's not about care.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: The member has brought forward quite a few bills that the NDP has put forward to help with long-term care, to help with retirement homes, to help with seniors' care. One that we haven't talked about much is a bill that I brought forward to limit the use of agency nursing.

There are long-term-care homes where every single staff comes from an agency. There is no continuity of care. You cannot provide quality care in long-term care when you don't know the residents that you are dealing with. The better the relationship between the care providers and the residents, the better the quality of care. Why do you think that the PCs voted against it, and do you think it would be a good idea to limit the use of agency nursing in long-term care?

MPP Wayne Gates: Let's be clear, there are some parts of the province of Ontario, like the north, where they may need an agency nurse, but not to the extent that you're spending a billion dollars of taxpayers' money so some company can make money. They're charging the hospital or the long-term care, the retirement home, as much as \$300 an hour for that nurse, and that puts them in a financial thing.

The other thing we hadn't talked about—I don't know how much time I've got, 30 seconds—how about Bill 124? If you ever cared about workers, if you ever cared about PSWs, if you ever cared about nurses, if you cared about our seniors, you would never have brought Bill 124 in. Because PSWs and our nurses were leaving because they felt unappreciated. You capped their wages at 1%, and that's your total compensation package, including wages and benefits, and you decided to allow inflation to go to 7%, and that's why we got a thing. You should never have brought Bill 124 in here.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We are out of time. We will move to further debate. Further debate? Further debate?

Ms. Kusendova-Bashta has moved second reading of Bill 235, An Act to amend the Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021 and the Retirement Homes Act, 2010. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, 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.

Second reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Orders of the day? The government House leader.

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, if you seek it, you shall find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Do we have unanimous consent to see the clock at 6? Agreed.

Report continues in volume B.

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| Bresee, Ric (PC) | Hastings—Lennox and Addington | |
| Burch, Jeff (NDP) | Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre | |
| Byers, Rick (PC) | Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound | |
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| Dowie, Andrew (PC) | Windsor—Tecumseh | |
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| Fife, Catherine (NDP) | Waterloo | |

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|---|--|---|
| Flack, Hon. / L'hon. Rob (PC) | Elgin—Middlesex—London | Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et de l'Agroentreprise |
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| | | Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales |
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| Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC) | Newmarket—Aurora | |
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| Gélinas, France (NDP) | Nickel Belt | |
| Ghamari, Goldie (IND) | Carleton | |
| Glover, Chris (NDP) | Spadina—Fort York | |
| Gretzky, Lisa (NDP) | Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest | |
| Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC) | Brampton East / Brampton-Est | |
| Hamid, Zee (PC) | Milton | |
| Hardeman, Ernie (PC) | Oxford | |
| Harden, Joel (NDP) | Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre | |
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| Hazell, Andrea (LIB) | Scarborough—Guildwood | |
| Hogarth, Christine (PC) | Etobicoke—Lakeshore | |
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| 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 |
| Kusendova-Bashta, Hon. / L'hon. Natalia (PC) | Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre | Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée |
| Leardi, Anthony (PC) | Essex | Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement |
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| Martin, Robin (PC) | Eglinton—Lawrence | |
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| McCrimmon, Karen (LIB) | Kanata—Carleton | |

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|--|---|--|
| McGregor, Hon. / L'hon. Graham (PC) | Brampton North / Brampton-Nord | Associate Minister of Auto Theft and Bail Reform / Ministre associé de la Lutte contre le vol d'automobiles et de la Réforme relative aux mises en liberté sous caution |
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| Pang, Billy (PC) | Markham—Unionville | |
| 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 |
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| 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 Deputy Government Whip / Whip adjointe du gouvernement |
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| Pinsonneault, Steve (PC) | Lambton—Kent—Middlesex | |
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| 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 Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation / Ministre des Affaires autochtones et de la Réconciliation économique avec les Premières Nations Minister of Northern Development / Ministre du Développement du Nord |
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| Romano, Ross (PC) | Sault Ste. Marie | |
| Sabawy, Sheref (PC) | Mississauga—Erin Mills | |
| Sandhu, Amarjot (PC) | Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest | |
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| 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 | |
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| Smith, David (PC) | Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre | |
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| Smith, Laura (PC) | Thornhill | |
| Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP) | St. Catharines | |
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| Tabuns, Peter (NDP) | Toronto—Danforth | |
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| Taylor, Monique (NDP) | Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain | |
| Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon. Vijay (PC) | Scarborough—Rouge Park | Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associé du Logement |

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| Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC) | Vaughan—Woodbridge | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué à la Santé mentale et à la Lutte contre les dépendances |
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| Vanthof, John (NDP) | Timiskaming—Cochrane | Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle |
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| 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 |
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