

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 151

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N° 151

1st Session
42nd Parliament
Wednesday
4 March 2020

1^{re} session
42^e législature
Mercredi
4 mars 2020

Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Todd Decker

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111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



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Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1180-2987

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 4 March 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 4 mars 2020

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Good morning. We'll begin this morning with a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SECURITY FROM TRESPASS
AND PROTECTING FOOD SAFETY
ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 SUR LA PROTECTION
CONTRE L'ENTRÉE SANS AUTORISATION
ET SUR LA PROTECTION
DE LA SALUBRITÉ DES ALIMENTS

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 20, 2020, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 156, An Act to protect Ontario's farms and farm animals from trespassers and other forms of interference and to prevent contamination of Ontario's food supply /
Projet de loi 156, Loi visant à protéger les fermes et les animaux d'élevage en Ontario contre les entrées sans autorisation et d'autres actes susceptibles de les déranger et à prévenir la contamination de l'approvisionnement alimentaire en Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Apparently, the member for Timmins had the floor when we last debated this bill, and so now we are going to do questions and comments related to Mr. Bisson's presentation.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Our records indicate that the member for Timmins had the floor and made a presentation, and now we're doing questions and responses with respect to the presentation that was made by the member for Timmins.

Member for Niagara West.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I did not have the opportunity, Speaker, to hear the member opposite's speech, but I do have some questions with regard to the member's and the party opposite's plan for rural Ontario. We know that we hear a great deal from the members opposite about some of the concerns that they might have in urban centres, but for a great deal of time we know that rural Ontario was not represented under the former Liberal government.

My question to the member opposite is why, when they were propping up the Liberal government, did they support so many destructive policies that ended up hurting rural Ontarian communities? And why were they willing

to do so when they claim, when speaking to this type of legislation, to be willing to stand up for farmers in rural communities?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'd like to point out to the member across the way that there was a majority government in place. I want to explain how a majority government works. It's just like yours: You decide what you call off the order paper when it comes to debate. You get to design the legislation that you want to have debated, and you get to pass it because you have a majority. It's as simple as that. This whole notion is a bit of a silly one because the government had a majority, and as this government does, the government used its majority to move its agenda forward.

I'll agree with you. A lot of their policies were pretty bad. The electricity policy, specifically, hurt a lot of northern communities and rural communities and people in their own homes. There are a lot of things that we can agree on that they didn't do a very good job on, but don't forget, they were a majority government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: When the member from Timmins was speaking to Bill 156, he referenced our long-standing tradition to support freedom of expression and freedom of the press. I'm referencing a letter that was done by 38 legal professionals from across the country. They say, "If Bill 156 is passed as drafted, it would effectively cut off an important source of public information and a driver of policy change. It would silence journalists and those who advocate for animal protection by exposing the abuse of animals at agricultural facilities and violate their charter rights." Does the member think this piece of legislation will be challenged in the courts?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further response? The member from Timmins.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think you were going to say "Timmins-James Bay," but that was the other riding.

Listen, I think there is a distinct possibility that that's going to happen. If you listen to people who have talked to us about it—because they have come to our offices, on both sides of the House, to talk about what they like in the bill—there are some things in this bill that, quite frankly, we can support. We agree with the government that we need to make sure that we deal with food security in a way that is good for both the farmer and good for the community etc.

But there are concerns, and that's really the balance here. How do you do what you are trying to do in this bill without stepping on the ability for people to express their

views about whatever it might be that you may not agree with? That's always a challenge in a democracy. Any time that a Parliament tries to limit that, I think we're treading in pretty dangerous water.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Question?

Mr. Mike Harris: It's nice to be able to take part in questions and responses today. The member from Timmins was able to take part in mine, and unfortunately, I wasn't here to take part in listening to him.

But I just wanted to ask him—in a general sense, he's really concerned about limiting people's rights and freedoms and freedom of expression. But is it okay for someone to, essentially, break into your private property, take pictures, and potentially harm what's happening as far as biosecurity on your farm, contaminating our food supply? Is it okay for someone to come in and do that on private property when they have not been invited? That is the question that I put to the member.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I want to borrow a line from Kathleen Wynne, to that question: That was a stretch question.

I just have to say, listen, we all agree, on both sides of the House, that we need to make sure that the farm is made safe, that food processing facilities are made safe, that we don't have a situation where people can just go in and do what they want and that you're able to control that in some way. But the way that this particular legislation is drawn up does represent some issues.

I'm hoping that when it goes to committee that the government will hear what has to be said about some of the friendly amendments that can be made. For example, to go from having somebody show up on your property and not having to call the police and going right to a citizen's arrest, I think, is skipping a spot. There should be a place in there where we say that the first thing is you ask the person to leave. If not, call the police, and if you have to, then do a citizen's arrest.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: To the member from Timmins: When he was speaking to Bill 156, he also referenced the letter that was delivered to the Attorney General and to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. It reads as follows: "We the undersigned Canadian law professors and constitutional and criminal law experts write to express our concerns with Bill 156.... Aspects of the bill would infringe individuals' rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, and therefore violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms."

We know that this government is in court with the teachers, with the midwives, with the students, with the environmentalists. This piece of legislation likely will end up in the courts. How will this benefit farmers in the province of Ontario, or in the country, for that matter?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I want to thank you for the question. You forgot one group that's before the courts: corporate Ontario. There's a whole bunch of companies that are actually bringing the government to court when it comes to the breaking of contracts that were signed.

Now, did I like those contracts? Did the government like the contracts? Absolutely not. We think what the government did when it came to some of their energy contracts, quite frankly, was beyond the pale. But one of the difficulties once you start breaking contracts is, you put it out there that—if you're a government that's prepared to negate a contract, then how does that provide stability for businesses?

0910

And then to the question, specifically to what the member says: Yes, I agree. There is an issue here, and it's something that we're going to have to resolve at committee, because I can't believe that, in this day and age, we want to find a way that's going to take away the right of individuals to their lawful ability to do what they've got to do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Parm Gill: I also want to thank the member, even though I didn't have the opportunity to listen to his remarks either, but I do have a question. A lot of people might not know, but I represent a significant rural part of my riding in Milton, so we've got a lot of farmers. This is a serious concern that's raised by a lot of them when it comes to food safety and security. As mentioned by a number of my colleagues, for a lot of the farmers, they obviously live and work at the same place, so it's a concern, especially when it comes to trespassing.

Just this morning, I was attending a reception downstairs hosted by Chicken Farmers of Ontario Women in Leadership, and I was talking to one of the attendees there, even. She's a single mother, she has got three children, and she raised a similar concern. It really concerns her, the fact that she lives on a large farm, and she's constantly worried that there may be trespassers—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Response?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I attended, along with a number of our colleagues, not just that meeting, but I was actually with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, who raised some of the same issues.

Our critic, the member for Timiskaming, has already said, and we have said, there's much in this bill that we support, but there needs to be some amendments at committee. One of the points that we make is that when it comes to the ability to do a citizen's arrest, that's something that already exists in the existing laws, but there should be a step in between where you first try calling the police before you do a citizen's arrest.

There are a few other items, such as were raised by my colleague, that we need to deal with, and I think when this bill goes to committee we should be able to amend it in some way to make that happen.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Finally, to the member from Timmins: In your comments, you commented on the right of peaceful protests not being made illegal, and obviously we're worried that this bill might impact people's basic

rights in this province. We can't forget that farmers feed us, but people also have a charter right to express their views, as our critic has also identified.

To the member from Timmins: Where do you see this piece of legislation going, and can it actually be fixed by the opposition?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, through you: I definitely think the bill can be fixed, but the government is going to have to listen to what is said at committee. I can't believe, in this day and age, that any government of any stripe would want to have a bill passed at third reading and enacted that would take away a citizen's right to be able to assemble, to be able to protest or to express their views. I may not like what they're saying, and you may not like what they're saying, but they have a right to say it so long as they don't do anything that puts people into danger. We need to be able to find a balance with all of that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? I recognize the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: Thanks, Speaker. Good morning. It's nice to see you in the chair this morning, Speaker.

It's a pleasure for me to join in the debate of Bill 156, An Act to protect Ontario's farms and farm animals from trespassers and other forms of interference and to prevent contamination of Ontario's food supply. This was a bill that, prior to its introduction, was discussed in my riding by local farmers when Minister Hardeman came and had an agricultural round table. It's a bill that I think is very important. I certainly support it.

Because of that priority to move this bill forward, I move that the question be now put.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Mr. Clark has moved that the question be now put. I am satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House since there has been over nine hours and 53 minutes of debate.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion that the question be now put, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion that the question be now put, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, this vote will be deferred until after question period today.

Vote deferred.

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO HOME
AND COMMUNITY CARE ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020
POUR CONNECTER LA POPULATION
AUX SERVICES DE SOINS À DOMICILE
ET EN MILIEU COMMUNAUTAIRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 3, 2020, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 175, An Act to amend and repeal various Acts respecting home care and community services / Projet de loi 175, Loi modifiant et abrogeant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les services de soins à domicile et en milieu communautaire.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise in this House, like always, and to speak to a bill—I believe an issue, actually—that is so close to my heart, because this is something that has affected me personally for many, many years, but also it affects the people of my riding very closely. I get to talk to a lot of people in my riding who have home care, who have PSWs, and have some really, really telling stories that are so important to share in this House. So it is really powerful, I believe, to share some of these stories in this House as well.

I rise today to speak to Bill 175, the Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act. First, I want to begin by talking a little bit about the title of this bill because I think, just in itself, it gives a lot of hope to people about connecting them to the care that they truly need. This act is intended, in its essence, to really provide people in our province with the right type of care that they need, whether they are home after a hospital visit and need that support, or elders who need the support at home, be it any of those.

I want to begin by talking a little bit about some of the things that are in this bill in the sense that it really focuses on how we have encouraged PSWs in this province. I think that was one of the core things that I took away from this bill—even though it gave that hope to people that we are really going to provide care for the people of Ontario, it wasn't actually doing this. That false hope, especially to our elders, is a really scary thing, because people—families, children, all of us in this province—will really rely on that.

I want to begin by sharing my personal story because, at a very young age, a family member, my father, faced a situation where he ended up in the hospital. After a few years in rehab, he was at home. We had social workers, occupational therapists, personal support workers, physiotherapists, speech therapists—the full team—that really supported my father to get back up, along with my mother. I have to say that from the age of 12 or so, I have watched how they really transformed—it was like watching a baby learning to walk again. That's how it was in my home.

First, I want to say to the folks out there, if you have someone named Jeremy, Rick, Kim, Joey, Anne, Ruby—all of these people were such amazing people, and especially Jim Peasant, who passed away and my father attended his funeral because he was our social worker. It broke my dad's heart when he passed away because that person became a family member. So these people have a real, real impact in the lives of these individuals and what they do.

One of the things I noticed was how they really helped my father learn to walk again, learn to speak again, and learn to basically become physically and mentally independent, which was so important.

0920

I have to say, when I remember these days, I cannot imagine how we would be—how any of us in our family would be—without the support of these wonderful individuals, especially our PSWs. They were there early in the morning, despite having so many patients, despite having such a busy schedule. And the work they do is really mentally and physically strenuous. The work that they do, it's so incredible. I know that my father, who was in pain all the time, wasn't the nicest person at that time. So they're really dealing with a lot of issues. Every patient—they go from door to door. Sometimes they might have a really nice day; sometimes these workers are facing really difficult days. We have to make sure that we are rewarding them the best way possible. We have to make sure that we allow for them to have good pay and to have good benefits.

I know I sound biased in this, but I think all of us should be. I think in our own right, we should be, because these people who help us get back up, we should make sure that they have good pay and good benefits. I share this because—it was almost more than 15 years or so that we had the support. I know that some of them were really tired; they actually left that profession and moved on to do something else, because they felt that they didn't really have a path in this profession. That breaks my heart, because they were wonderful people doing their job so gracefully. It really happens in this province a lot in terms of retention. We lose a lot of these professionals because we don't have the right sort of encouragement, the right way of keeping them and retaining them in this profession.

When I look at this bill—at first I thought, "Wow, this is great," because we're going to make sure that we allow for people to have that care. We are going to make sure that that gap that was created in the last two decades or so for people receiving this care that we so badly need, this bill is going to fix that. Then when I take a closer look—I want to go a little bit schedule by schedule. When I look at schedule 1, the first thing when I'm looking at the language of it, I get a little worried. That's because there are a few things that have been added that make me a little concerned. These are the hints in this bill, throughout this bill, that lead towards privatization of our care system.

When I'm looking at the issue of more choice—every time that this government has pointed to more choice, Mr. Speaker, I get a little concerned because what essentially they are saying is not about choice, but that we're moving towards a system of privatization. Why that worries me is because when we look at care—just like education, when we look at health care and home care, the services that we so essentially need, it has to be about care; it cannot be about profit. That's the bottom line. It has to be about the care of the people of this province. It has to be about the care of the wonderful people who have paid their dues, who worked so hard, who built this province; it has to be about them rather than profit. When I look at some of the language in this bill, I am really, really concerned that we're going to shift towards a system of privatization where we will actually hurt people and we will face a situation where it will be about the money of certain

organizations and certain corporations, and not about the people of this province who so badly need the support.

Also, then I look at how much are we really making it possible for PSWs—are we really encouraging them—to stay in their profession. I don't think so. The way this bill is put together, it doesn't actually help a lot of the PSWs, not to mention it doesn't even talk about occupational therapists. Occupational therapists are such an essential component in terms of making sure of the entire plan for somebody to have the support and what sort of care they need. It's like a team: You have a team and you have a team leader, and you have to make sure that, "We need one, two, three, four, and here is the person." I remember what a relief it is to know that there is an actual plan for your family member.

The fact that this bill completely ignores the whole section about occupational therapists, OTs, worries me, because just around a decade ago was a time when we started noticing that occupational therapists were slowly pushed away from our health care system, in a way where we were seeing that there were pieces of the care team missing. That makes it really difficult for families, because now what they're trying to do is go out of their way to have that conversation with the PSW, to see, "Well, maybe my husband needs this. Maybe my mother needs this. How do we do that?" If we take away certain professionals who are actually creating that plan, the safety plan, for these individuals, it's really difficult for the PSWs to do their jobs, and they're not paid very well.

I'm going to refer back to the education system again. If we don't give them time to plan, if we don't give them time to actually look at the curriculum, if we don't give them the time to make sure that they're actually doing the planning ahead for what they need to do with their patients, they will only have that time when they come in. So if we're looking at 45 minutes to an hour, that's all they will have to care for that individual.

Then I look at the other section, about the voucher system, which is what I hinted at, which is basically the way of self-directed care, which doesn't really guarantee the quality of care. What I'm talking about here is that Bill 175 removes the restriction on self-directed care, where currently only in LHINs can that component be found. It is very concerning, because self-directed care doesn't look at what the patient needs, doesn't look at the quality of care. It will cause a lot of problems because it will move away from the essential needs of a certain individual who, let's say, just left the hospital or an elder who is at home and needs home care, because it will have that gap growing in our system.

The extraordinary powers that are also in this bill—actually, I want to remind folks about Bill 74. Bill 175 also provides for new extraordinary cabinet regulation-making powers that previously did not exist. Time and time again in this House, I have talked about the power that this government is giving itself throughout their many bills. Previously, last week, I talked about the bill for our justice system allowing the Attorney General to have more power; or the bill about transit—I forget the number right

now—that allows for the Minister of Transportation and Metrolinx to have a lot of power. This bill, Bill 175, also gives a lot of power to the cabinet to make a lot of regulations.

The reason it's concerning is because we have seen this government make a lot of policies in legislation where they have not consulted. When they do not consult with the people of this province and they go ahead and make something, it worries me because you're missing a huge component of it.

Actually, the proof of that is really clearly shown in this bill, which is what the nurses' association has told us. The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario has pointed out that they're concerned about 4,500 care coordinators and nurse positions that may be eliminated. That's really concerning, because this many nurses will possibly lose their jobs because of this bill, it has been pointed out. I'm really concerned about that because it really shows how this government has missed out on key stakeholders, key ground people, key folks who have not voiced their concerns in the sense that they are making sure that this bill actually points out a lot of problems.

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I want to point out how important it is that we make sure that we consult with the right people and right organizations and the people on the ground—make sure that we actually talk to the people on the ground. That's the key component of that.

Over the last six or seven months, I had the opportunity to meet with a lot of folks in Scarborough who are advocating for home care and for long-term care, who are residents of long-term care or are receiving home care. I have also had the opportunity to talk to a lot of family members who have family that are receiving home care. And one thing I have to tell you—first, I have to say thanks to Seven Oaks, a team that actually provides excellent care, but also thanks to the residents in that home for telling me how their lives have been.

I also want to thank Naomi D'Souza, a wonderful woman who has been advocating for the last 12 years or so for residents in Scarborough to receive proper long-term care and proper home care.

What I have learned over the past six months is that there is a huge gap—well, first, the home care system that we have within our health care umbrella is completely broken. I think both sides will agree to that. And I think both sides will have a sense of compassion for that because I'm sure that members on both sides of this House have had family members who have had home care services. I'm sure that members on both sides of the House have had dealings with PSWs or social workers or nurses, or have been to the hospital just recently. And I'm sure you feel how important these components are in our health care sector.

When I tell you some of the stories that I have received, some of the stories that I have heard during the last six or seven months as we met and as we had many town halls—we even invited the Minister of Long-Term Care to come to one of our town halls, which she unfortunately was not

able to do, but we have shared what we found, as well, with the ministry because it is so important that we have consultations, that we hear from our residents and we hear from the advocates for what we really need. One of the things we heard was that there is a shortage of PSWs, which this bill does not fix at all. You cannot legislate things without actually putting in the money and putting in the effort and making it easier for these people who are in the job to do their jobs. This bill does not do that at all.

Just like housing: If you don't have enough housing and if you don't have the right policies to provide people with housing, you are not going to fix the problem. When we look at the shortage of PSWs, it's a real problem because people will press their bell in their rooms and—I have shared this story before. One of the stories that a resident told me in Scarborough is that if someone falls down in the washroom, if someone slips, it takes a very long time for someone to come and answer that call. And it's not because these people don't want to. It's not because these PSWs, these nurses, these workers don't want to; it's because they have way too many people that they are taking care of, and they are running from one room to another and trying to do their best.

Forget about their own health. Forget about their mental and physical health. Many of them end up dealing with WSIB just a few years after. Many of them end up having a lot of back pain and a lot of chronic pain problems after doing this job because of how strenuous this job is.

What happens if someone slips and falls down? You're looking at 15 or 20 minutes of someone bleeding on the floor and not having anyone answer their call. That breaks my heart, because we have to make sure that we're providing the right care and we're giving enough people to actually provide the support. Now, does this bill do that? No, it doesn't, but it gives people that hope that it will connect people to the right service; it gives people that hope that it will give us community and home care. But when you look at the actual details of this bill, it does not do that.

It really worries me, because no matter how flashy the language is, no matter how many times we say Ontario is open for business—first of all, Ontario is not a business; Ontario is our home, and we have to make sure that it's liveable. We have to make sure that we take care of this province, and we have to make sure that we are allowed to grow in this province, because that's what our home should be about, and not business.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It is time for questions. I recognize the member from Kitchener—Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: Well, I recognize you too, Mr. Speaker.

The current system for patients here in Ontario is not working. Models of care are not providing personal support workers with the job security that they need. The system is not based on patient outcomes. Our approach, through Bill 175 and our regulations, offers a real solution to this problem.

Why are the members opposite consistently standing up and defending the status quo?

Ms. Doly Begum: I think the member's question answers itself. First of all, we are not standing up for the status quo. The last 15 years is where we are right now. Because of the failures of the previous government, we are in this position right now. Instead of fixing it, this government is making it even worse. That's what the problem is. You have a majority government, just like they did, and you can fix it. You can actually fix the problem.

In your question you said, "We're going to focus on the care from the people's perspective, from the ground up." Are you actually doing that? No, you're not. If you read the bill carefully—and there are lots of copies right in the front there; please take a look at it, because it does not do that. Instead, it actually makes it about profit. It opens up a lot of doors to privatization.

The other problem is, when we have a shortage of nurses, when we have a shortage of PSWs—

Interjections.

Ms. Doly Begum: If you ask the question, you might want to listen to my—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Further questions? I recognize the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: It's a great name. Thank you, Speaker.

As many times I want to bring the perspective of home care in northern Ontario, I'd like to ask a question that I think I know the answer to, but we do that in this House often anyway.

What I'd like to know is, when I speak with home care providers in my riding, and PSWs and others who work in the home care field, they talk about the challenges of, first, not being consulted about this bill, and a fear of not wanting to comment too rigorously about it because they're afraid that they may not be part of the chosen few to provide home care after the new system comes into place. Although I do understand contracts—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Back to the member from Scarborough Southwest.

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member for the question. Actually, if I may take a moment to share an important story about why I'm passionate and why it's so important that we focus on care from the people's perspective: I have a constituent who recently reached out to us, actually, before this bill was even tabled. She's 89 years old. She's legally blind, she has dementia and she's totally bedridden, and spent three to five months at a hospital. I don't want to disclose the name of the hospital.

She wears diapers, she needs to be changed at least three to four times a day, and she needs a lot of care. The amount of care that she needs will cost about \$5,000 per month. If she were to actually do that, this woman would be bankrupt, and we're looking at a point where she would not receive that care and actually might have bedsores from the way she is right now. So we really need to make sure—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Further questions?

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Mr. David Piccini: I appreciate the opportunity to rise and ask a question and thank you for your comments. To the member who offered a northern perspective, I'd like to humbly offer a rural perspective, being from Northumberland–Peterborough South.

The member spoke about a broken system under the Liberals—I think that's something we can both agree on—but I would like some tangible ideas. What we've seen in my community: After 25 years of no movement on home and community care, it's now being embedded in Ontario health teams. My community was one of 24 selected. We now have a robust volunteer network. We have community paramedicine rolled out, thanks to this government. We have rural health hub clinics rolled out, thanks to this government. So we have better patient-centred care. We're centring home care—embedding it in better patient-centred delivery of care, and we're embedding it into Ontario health teams.

My question to the member is: What's your solution, then? What about what I described in rural Ontario isn't fundamentally a step forward for better patient-centred care?

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you for that question and for the perspective that you have given for rural Ontario. I think in every corner of this province, we have to make sure that we provide care for every single family member that we need to. For that, what I would do is make sure that we have proper funding in our health care system, proper funding in our long-term-care and our home care system. But also, what I wouldn't do is open doors for privatization. I have to really emphasize that, because we cannot—we cannot—open the door for privatization when it comes to our health and when it comes to the care of our family members.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think the member from Scarborough Southwest correctly outlined the challenges that exist in home care. I was at a home-care home visit on Friday and meeting with the former CCAC and LHIN manager. They basically said that it's out of their control because the contracts were signed with the CCAC, and they were grandfathered into the LHIN. You're doubling down on this model through privatization.

How does the member feel about there being no accountability measures with Bill 175? There's almost no legislative provision to hold the Ministry of Health, the Ontario health teams or Ontario health service providers accountable for the hours and the service and the quality of the care that clients are receiving in the province of Ontario.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you to the member from Waterloo for her question. I think she has really beautifully outlined what the problem is with this bill, but also what we have to do for making sure that we provide better home care.

You know, I don't have a lot of trust, just like a lot of people in this province don't have a lot of trust, in this

government, because when we look at the opportunities that this government has had in terms of fixing problems—and that goes back to the idea of the recommendations in the Wettlaufer investigation. If we were really passionate about fixing this problem and creating accountability, then this government would have taken those recommendations and made sure that they implemented those, because there were some really good recommendations in making sure that we create accountability and measures that actually help protect our family members.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Parm Gill: I want to thank the member opposite for her remarks. I also want to take this opportunity to thank the PA for health, the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, for all the hard work that she has been doing on this file.

Mr. Speaker, we all know the current legislation was last updated in 1994, and that's a quarter of a century ago. These regulations will now allow our system to do well, with full transparency and accountability to the public, instead of letting it stagnate for another quarter of a century. I am wondering if the member opposite believes home care services are going to look the same, say, in another decade or two.

Ms. Doly Begum: I thank the member for his question. It's really unfortunate that this bill wasn't looked at. We didn't make sure that we keep up with the needs of this province in many of the different sectors, and this is one of them. The fact that, since 1994, we haven't had any improvement shows, really, the failed legacy of the Liberals. That's why I'm really concerned and I'm kind of worried as to why you haven't done a better job in this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: The member from Scarborough Southwest referenced the word “trust.” I think that is the heart of the problem, because members across the aisle say, “Why don't you trust us?” Well, you've messed up pricing pollution, you've added pressure to the court system, you're in court with almost everybody and education, for instance, is in chaos.

To the member from Scarborough Southwest: The fact that Bill 175 has no strategy whatsoever to address the PSW shortage in the province of Ontario—how do you feel this will impact the overall goals of home care without having a PSW strategy?

Ms. Doly Begum: Mr. Speaker, this is a serious bill. This is a serious issue. The long-term care, the home care, the health care system in this province is in crisis. This government should take that very, very seriously.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? I recognize the member from Niagara West.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you very much, Speaker. Today, I will be splitting my time with the member for Peterborough South-Kawartha.

I appreciate all of the work that you do, Speaker, in your chair. I know it's important on a Wednesday morning to

be able to make sure everyone is keeping things civil and engaged, and I appreciate that work as well.

It's such a privilege to be able to rise in this House as the member for Niagara West to speak to a piece of legislation that I believe is vital to our government's commitment toward ending hallway health care.

I have had the great privilege of serving the people of Niagara West for a little over three years now. I was elected in 2016. When I was elected, we were coming to the end of a Liberal regime that had been in place for 13 years at the time. By the time that our government was sent to this place as a government, of course, it was 15 years.

Nearing the end of those 15 years, a recurring theme came through time and time again. That was about the quality of health care in our province, where there was a need to address so many challenges that existed and there was a need to also ensure that there was patient-centred care when and where people needed it. That's something that was very carefully thought about by the people I spoke with when they were making their choice at the ballot box.

Because of the importance of this issue, we know the Liberal government was one that talked a good talk but didn't end up providing the services that were necessary. In many cases, when they did provide the services that existed, they did so in such a way that it wasn't, in fact, the best use of taxpayer dollars.

Now, of course we recognize that health care, education and social services are areas that Ontarians depend upon, and we have made historic investments in them. But it's not just about spending more money. You can spend a lot of money and not necessarily see a great result for that money. At the end of the day, it's not money that the government owns; it's tax dollars that we are given in trust from the people of this great province. So we have, I believe, a fiduciary duty to those taxpayers to ensure that we are getting not just value for money, but seeing improvements in the system as a whole with regard to what systems are in place to provide the care that Ontarians depend upon.

Since forming government, I've had many people who have come forward and said, “We supported you for a number of different reasons: getting the economy back on track, restoring trust and accountability in government, and also ending hallway health care.” In my riding, specifically with regard to the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital, this has been a major area of concern that people are very pleased to see our government taking action on.

But it doesn't just end there. Over the 10 years before our government came to office, there were only 611 long-term-care beds built in the province of Ontario—611. It's practically a joke to see that that's how few, but it would be a very, very sad joke.

We recognize that long-term-care beds and hospitals are incredibly important pieces, integral to providing for a safe and healthy society. But we also know that not everyone wants to, nor should, be serviced in those particular types of facilities. They provide a very important role and one that we recognize as important, which is why our government has, as I said, committed to the West Lincoln

Memorial Hospital in Niagara, the expansion of the Hotel Dieu Shaver rehabilitation site, as well as a new south Niagara hospital—a significant expenditure on the capital front for physical locations that are so important.

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We also recognize that many people do not want to, and should not, in fact, be treated or be kept in those types of facilities. But in order to make the changes that are necessary to provide for adequate home care, providing compassionate care for people as they age in place or even just to provide the care that people need at particular moments throughout their life—perhaps it's not long-term care in the later years of life or those who have chronic illnesses; perhaps it's even just for a period of time to get someone back up on their feet.

I know in my riding I've had many different people reach out to me with concerns about the lack of access to that care, that after 15 years of Liberal government it was not coming through. I'm very proud to tell those people, the people of Niagara West and the people of the Niagara region as a whole, that our government has been making significant moves to address this issue.

One of the first steps that our government took under the Minister of Health was, of course, Bill 74, The People's Health Care Act. That really ensured that we broke down a lot of the barriers between organizations, to make sure that organizations were speaking to each other about the need of the patient, and that a patient can flow through efficiently. Of course, as part of that, that means winding down the LHINs, incredibly expensive and bureaucratic levels of bureaucracy that simply add to the costs of the health care system without providing the type of care that patients expect and deserve.

It's why Bill 175, the Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act, is so important. It removes some of the archaic structures focused around the home and community care space that have been in place for 30 years and didn't recognize much of the innovation and opportunities that have arisen here in Ontario, which we've heard about from individuals, yes, who have raised particular concerns with the level of coverage they or their loved ones are getting, but also from organizations that see opportunities to provide better levels of care in a way that can address the changing challenges we're facing through demographic growth, through an increasing number of aging population, and of course recognizing that we need to look at innovative solutions to doing so.

If passed, this legislation will allow Ontario health teams to deliver more innovative models of home and community care. It will ensure that patients will benefit from primary care, hospitals, home and community care, and long-term providers, being able to collaborate directly together to provide care that best meets individual care needs.

Speaker, this is such an important piece. Just looking through some of the various emails and letters I have received, there was a line that stuck out to me. One individual, Tom from my riding, reached out to me and spoke about his brother's frustrating journey for a geriatric

placement in Niagara. He says, "The present state of our efforts to try to get" a long-term "placement started for this patient have been frustrated by what I can only describe as 'paralysis by analysis,' which leaves my brother stuck in miserable circumstances ... underserved ... where he consistently misses morning meals and cannot participate in community activities that have been recommended for his benefit."

Speaker, the reality is this is a situation that has arisen because of a lack of connectivity between organizations that are supposed to be providing care to the patient when and where they need it. That's really the fundamental issue we're trying to address here. That type of paralysis by analysis can happen when organizations don't have a clear path for where the patient has to go, and the patient himself or herself doesn't have the supports in place to make sure that they're able to get through to an appropriate level of care. Not everyone should be in an ALC bed; not everybody should be in a long-term-care bed either, and some people need to ensure that they have those levels of support in home.

This legislation will make sure that those organizations that work together in the Ontario health teams can work together to understand a patient's full health care history, directly connect them to the different types of care that they need, and help patients 24/7 in navigating the health care system. This is through ensuring greater access and flexibility in areas around the provision of digital services, so those who have lower needs are able to access that service when and where they need it, instead of needing to go all the way to a hospital.

It also removes maximum levels of care, which is a very, very exciting piece for people across the province—*Interjection.*

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: —absolutely, worthy of applause—to see that our government is taking that extraordinary step to ensure that if you only get three hours a day or two hours a day or however much service that is, it's as much care as you need to ensure that you get back up on your feet, you don't end up in a hospital emergency room and you are taken care of where you need to be taken care of.

We also ensure that, through this legislation, we are winding down the LHINs in a phased way, as home and community care services are being transitioned to Ontario health teams. Our efforts to modernize the delivery of home and community care address a key pillar of our comprehensive plan to end hallway health care.

So this prevention and health promotion piece, alongside providing the right care in the right place, includes expanding access to home and community care. This legislation provides the framework—the legislative framework and the legal framework—to ensure that we can work with agencies, we can work with organizations that exist within the Ontario health teams, to move forward in a way that provides the level of care that constituents in my riding expect.

I have here a number of different letters from constituents who have a great deal of concerns. Much of it is just

frustration with having to navigate through this system. Whether these are letters that have come under the Liberal government, or even since we took office—we recognize these changes don't happen overnight. People do have a deep frustration with not being able to see their loved ones being taken care of when they are people, sometimes at the end of life or sometimes who are bright and healthy and just need a little bit of extra care and support to get back up on their feet—there is a great level of frustration. That's why this legislation provides to break down those barriers, so families can enter the health care system when and where they need it, and they can get the level of support that they need from home care, community care and also institutions that are part of the Ontario health teams.

I have a great privilege to be able to speak to this on behalf of my constituents. I know they will be well-served by this, and I now look forward to seeing the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South speak to this as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Now I turn it over to the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South.

Mr. David Piccini: I'm pleased to rise today to speak about Bill 175, Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act.

I'd first like to thank the MPP from Eglinton–Lawrence for her phenomenal work on this, for the very important work she has done to better support patients in the province of Ontario, and of course to my colleague to my right here from Niagara West whose important work—we've seen breaking ground on new hospitals and all sorts of great work happening thanks to his leadership.

I'm going to get real with the residents in Northumberland–Peterborough South and provide a bit of background and shoot straight with them. Let's look at the history and then talk about the steps we have taken to better home and community care. We had a broken hospital funding formula when our government was elected. We had Campbellford Memorial Hospital on life support. We had crowded hallways, merged in-patient units. Quite literally, the broken funding formula led to historic underfunding of both of our hospitals, Northumberland Hills Hospital and Campbellford Memorial Hospital.

The opposition like to throw around the “privatization” word. But, fast forward a year and a half later, what do we see in my riding of Northumberland–Peterborough South and across the province? We see a commitment to fixing the broken funding formula; we've seen \$13.5 million invested into our public hospitals in Northumberland–Peterborough South alone. We've seen transitional bed funding, taking alternate-level-of-care patients out of the emergency room, putting them into long-term care. We've seen the launch of Ontario health teams, which is wrapping our arms around the patients to deliver the right care at the right time at the right place. We've seen a launch of community paramedicine, which is going to, in a non-emergency setting, allow our health care professionals to support patients in my community. We've seen hospices breaking ground all over Northumberland–Peterborough

South. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, their fearmongering just doesn't add up when you look to ridings like Northumberland–Peterborough South.

So to home and community care—if passed, this will lead to more people being able to receive health care in the comfort of their own home, continue to reduce hospital overcrowding and contribute to our promise to end hallway health care. It will lead to cost savings that can be reinvested back into the front-line services. We know that crowded hallways and emergency rooms aren't always the best place to deliver health care for Ontarians, which is why better home and community care will support people in getting the right level of care at the right time.

It's important to provide some context for this bill. The existing legislation hasn't been changed in 25 years. And, Mr. Speaker, 25 years—I mean, 25 years ago, I didn't even dream of entering this place, and I was a lot smaller and a lot younger. That was around the time when the Jays last won the World Series—even longer, actually. It was in sore need of an update, because our health care system is changing, our needs in Ontario are changing, and after 15 years of neglect, we're not going to stand by on the sidelines. We're committed to bettering patient-centred care. That's exactly what this bill is doing. Health care and home care have changed significantly.

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We've heard from families, from patients, from the Premier's Council on Improving Healthcare and Ending Hallway Medicine and from front-line health system partners that the current framework was putting up barriers, needless silos that were complicated and tough to navigate. I know the member who spoke prior had letters from his residents. I get them every day too. We hear about a difficult system that's tough to navigate. We're breaking down those silos and barriers. We're embedding home and community care into our Ontario health teams.

If you look locally, what does an Ontario health team mean? It's 13 community partners, in my riding, who are experts in health care front-line service delivery, not politicians. They're designing this system, and it's going to be a better system. We need this new legislation to address these changing dynamics, and that's exactly what this new legislation does.

If passed, the legislation will allow Ontario health teams to deliver more innovative models of care that I spoke to. Patients will benefit from primary care, hospitals, home and community care and long-term-care providers being able to collaborate and provide the care that best meets individual needs.

I'm from rural Ontario, as I often say, and it's a wide and vast community. In fact, my community is larger than the country of Belgium. Those diverse needs require innovative models of care. It doesn't always mean that the answer is to rush to the emergency room. Better enabling our health care partners to work in tandem, like the 13 planning members on the planning committee from my OHT, wrapping their arms around the patient, is what they've been asking for. It's what our front-line health care providers have been asking for: “Let us deliver the right

level of care at the right time in the right place.” That’s exactly what this modernized framework is going to do.

Our health care system, quite literally, was on life support under the previous government. I think we got elected on a mandate to bring government into the 21st century. I look in front of me and I see the President of the Treasury Board who’s digitizing government. We’re quite literally taking this government, dragging it out from the shackles from which it was under, under the previous government, and modernizing health care that’s better centred around the patient.

As I said, the broken system didn’t allow various providers to work together. We saw the LHINs and the bureaucratization of our health care system, where folks in Scarborough were making decisions for folks in Bailieboro and in rural Ontario. What we’ve replaced that with in Northumberland–Peterborough South are expert clinicians and health care professionals working together at the planning table.

I don’t think anyone on this side of the House is saying, “We’ve got all the answers.” What we’re saying is, “We’re listening to our health care professionals.” We’re saying, “Let’s get our health care professionals around the table. Let’s let them deliver home and community care. Let’s wrap our arms around a system that’s going to better support patients.”

That’s exactly what we’re doing. I’ve been elected for a year and a half. Just a year and a half later, we’re launching pop-up community hubs in Colborne. We’ve launched community paramedicine that’s going to provide not only better patient-centred care, it’s going to allow our health care professionals in a non-emergency setting to practise their important skill set, to better support our patients.

We’ve seen alternate-level-of-care funding that has taken alternate-level-of-care patients—and for those who don’t know what that is, those are seniors who don’t need to be in the ER—out of the emergency room, putting them in long-term care. When we talk about the right level of care at the right time—hospice and palliative care. We’ve seen an expanded announcement in Clarington. We’ve seen shovels breaking ground on Ed’s House in Cobourg. We’ve seen the Bridge in Warkworth continue to do the great work we’re doing, and we’re working on Norwood now, as well.

Quite simply put, in a year and a half, we have fundamentally transformed health care. I didn’t even think we’d accomplish as much as we have in the last year and a half. It’s better, patient-centred care—

Interjection.

Mr. David Piccini: The member opposite can laugh and moan and groan, but she’s bringing no ideas to the table. The NDP would bankrupt this province, just like they’re bankrupt in ideas when it comes to the health care system.

We recognize that to put patients first, we need to end the current one-size-fits-all—

Interjection.

Mr. David Piccini: Again, she continues to moan and groan, because that’s what they want: a socialist, one-size-

fits-all system. We understand that listening to patients, that better designing rural care centred around the needs of the patients is what we need to do.

Our municipal members and our health care professionals support the fact that we are emboldening and we are supporting our community paramedicine program, enabling paramedics to support patients, enabling rural health care hub clinics and modernizing the legislative framework for home and community care so seniors in my riding can age in place with supports and confidence in living in their home, knowing that the health care system has wrapped its arms around them in the comfort of their own home.

As I said, care providers working as a team, modernizing this health care system—knowing that we don’t just need to deliver health care in the emergency room but that, in fact, to better support the vital professionals in the emergency room, we can go upstream and support our patients in their home. We can go upstream and support community paramedicine clinics. We can go upstream and support rural health hub clinics. We can launch Ontario health teams that don’t answer to bureaucrats but bring our health care professionals together and put them at the decision-making table, wrapping their arms around the patient.

This is what our modernized home and community care program is doing. It’s delivering better front-line, patient-centred care, and I’m proud to be part of a government that is welcoming the challenge, that’s standing up to meet the needs of patients in the 21st century.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: My question is, this morning, my colleague the member for Scarborough South-west gave an extremely thoughtful analysis based in her own family’s personal experience about what PSWs actually need and what would actually help to enhance the care that you say you want to provide.

I would like you, please, to respond directly, cut the “arms around patient” stuff—we all want to put our arms around patients, not literally. Cut the ideological nonsense and actually answer the questions and the proposals that the member made. Thank you.

Mr. David Piccini: I appreciate the personal examples. I’ll use a personal example to give an answer to the member opposite that she would well know. My grandmother, who recently passed away—whose funeral you were at—got patient-centred care. She wasn’t getting the—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. I ask the member to indulge for just a moment.

Pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been, in fact, 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.

Government House leader?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Debate to continue, please.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member may continue.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you, Speaker. So that was an excellent question. Let me give you my grandmother's example, or any frail and elderly senior who was constantly being rushed to the emergency room.

I remember looking at my mother, who struggled with balancing a full-time career and looking after aged parents—with dementia as well. This was very complex. But navigating that system was tough. The home and community care supports piece was very difficult to navigate.

I think if my grandmother were in Northumberland–Peterborough South today and had an Ontario health team coordinating that care, enabling our clinicians to prescribe a program that bounces off the 13 subcommittee members locally—I'm just using a local example—she would be fundamentally better looked after. It would provide much-needed ease for, for example, my mother and myself, who supported as well.

These are the sorts of things we are doing. When we talk about wrapping our arms around the patient, that sort of—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much.

Over to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga for questions.

Mr. Mike Harris: We've heard the members opposite today talk about trust. We sit here with a pretty large majority government. The people of Ontario have put their trust in us. They have not put their trust in the NDP. Not only that, they've only done it one time in 152 years in this province.

My question to the member across the way here is, I'd love him to highlight some more of the good things that this bill will do for the people of his riding.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you very much to the member opposite. He'll know I'm proud to be part of a government that's actually moving on the health care file, that's bringing ideas.

1010

Again, to build on his question and the member opposite's: These restrictive health care plans that required multiple assessments for home and community care—we're modernizing the legislative framework. We're modernizing the delivery of that care, embedding it into Ontario health teams. What are Ontario health teams? It's health care experts on the front line. We've got my hospital there. We've got our Indigenous First Nations. We've got the paramedics chief. We've got our county. We've got everybody involved in the delivery of patient-centred care at the table. Rather than the multiple barriers that were previously constructed under the previous legislation, this is going to be better patient-centred care that's not designed out of Scarborough or out of big LHINs; it's designed by clinicians and health care providers on the front lines—and no disrespect to Scarborough. I'm from Northumberland. It was a long way to go to get a plan.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: I am grateful that the debate was able to continue, because I would like to make

the point to the member that, yes, I loved your grandmother very dearly and was very honoured to be at her funeral. Your grandmother was in a very privileged position, and she was able to have the very best care that is available to people. What we need to ensure is that Ontarians across the province, most of whom do not have that ability and that privilege, also have access to the very best care.

That is why the comments of the member from Scarborough Southwest are so very important. I would be grateful if you would answer those directly, and the points that she was making about her constituents.

Mr. David Piccini: When we fundamentally transform health care, we don't look at someone's bank statement. We want a better health care system for all Ontarians, regardless of their race, religion, creed or how much money they have in their bank account.

Mr. Speaker, let's look at some of the most marginalized in Northumberland–Peterborough South. Right now, we talk about better home and community care—I said Ontario health teams are doing the decision-making here. Home and community paramedicine—the member opposite, please listen to this: In Alderville First Nation, in some of the most remote areas of our community, community paramedics can now visit patients in their homes and support them. That's critical. That's what this legislation is enabling us to do.

That's what better home and patient-centred care means—going to the most marginalized in our community, delivering a home care plan that best suits their needs, designed by clinicians in their community, not by bureaucrats at the LHIN headquarters in Scarborough. That's what this is about.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: In his remarks, the member talked about the right care at the right place at the right time. This really shows the fact that that is not happening right now, and that home care recipients have long faced restrictive plans, and that the status quo right now is a one-size-fits-all.

Can the member elaborate on how this new bill is bringing hope to the health care system by not treating everyone with a one-size-fits-all approach?

Mr. David Piccini: You're right; it's not about a one-size-fits-all. Home and community care—again, the siloed approach that was under a legislative framework that's 25 years old didn't embrace digital health.

The other day, I spoke to a single mom from rural Ontario who uses OTN and is able to get the health care she needs more frequently, thanks to embracing digital health, thanks to going to a clinic in Grafton, thanks to transformative health care changes by this government.

It's not just the digital piece. Should there be more complex comorbidity, should there be more complex needs, there's now a rural health help clinic coming to Colborne. It's a powerful example. It's in rural Ontario, and it's a tangible example of what our government is doing to better wrap our arms around the patient—and I'm

going to keep doing that, regardless of what members opposite say. Too often, patients who were left out in the cold, left to get through multiple assessments and multiple providers, didn't get the support they need. Thanks to Ontario health teams and home and community care—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It is now 10:15, so there will not be any further time for questions and responses, unfortunately.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Joel Harden: I've had the occasion, in the last number of weeks, to get around our community in Ottawa and talk to education workers, who unfortunately have had to go on strike to get this government's attention. It has been an educating experience in and of itself. I've had the occasion to talk—in my capacity as critic, disabilities—to many education workers, clerical staff and support staff who work with kids with disabilities. Speaker, it has been shocking for me to learn the degree to which the current system is underperforming.

While I hope we will see a resolution at the bargaining table, Speaker, I want to remind all of us in this House that we cannot continue to do public education on the cheap. We cannot continue to ask education assistants, early childhood educators, teachers, or clerical support—who today are acting almost as quasi-nurses when children injure themselves at school—we can't continue to ask these people to get in harm's way.

I want to talk briefly about an EA I met who had scratch marks all the way down his arm from having to interrupt a violent incident between two children. I want to talk about what was behind that. Speaker, it was a child with a disability whose needs have not been met.

What I'm encouraging this government to do is to abandon the rhetoric, stop talking about how child care tax credits are somehow education funding, put proper amounts of money into the system, fund the people on the front line, stop spinning, get a deal, and get it done.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: I had the pleasure of recently announcing that the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board has been approved to tender a child-care retrofit at Father Michael Goetz Catholic Secondary School in my riding. The \$1.4-million investment will add a new, quality learning environment for the students of Mississauga East-Cooksville.

Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board chair Sharon Hobin said, "This is great news for families, as there is significant demand for conveniently located child

care spaces in our communities," and she expressed gratitude to the ministry for the opportunity to tender this project.

Mr. Speaker, this retrofit would provide 49 new child care spaces and three retrofitted child care rooms. I'm thankful that our government is protecting what matters most and providing this funding, which will benefit so many families in Mississauga East-Cooksville.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: This House passed the Northern Health Travel Grant Advisory Committee Act, Bill 144, on second reading, and now it sits waiting to go through committee. Meanwhile, the situation for those who rely on the Northern Health Travel Grant is getting worse.

It is heartbreaking when people contact our office, unable to attend critical medical care because they do not have the money or credit to pay for their travel. Those who can pay are waiting longer and longer for reimbursement. When you try asking for your money, the Ontario government phone lines state that if it hasn't been eight weeks, hang up and wait. How is that an acceptable standard of service? Even emergency situations and repeat regular appointments are not granted any exceptions. Wait times now are routinely 12 to 20 weeks, and that is only if there are absolutely no problems with your claim.

Besides being ill, these folks now have financial stress. Rates have not been adjusted to keep pace with rising costs, and too many treatments are not covered. This is all unacceptable in Ontario.

I urge this government to move this legislation forward. It is within your power. Ensure that the principles of the Canada Health Act are upheld and that equitable access to health care becomes a reality for the people in northern Ontario.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We are in members' statements. I will say to members on both sides of the House that we need to have quiet in here while we have the members' statements. I would ask, if you are entering and exiting the chamber, to please keep the noise to a minimum so we can hear the member who has the statement, and I say this to both sides of the House.

1020

PARRY SOUND-MUSKOKA ATHLETES

Mr. Norman Miller: I rise today to congratulate some exceptional young athletes from Parry Sound-Muskoka.

Liam Brearley is a grade 11 student from Gravenhurst who, in February, took home a bronze FIS Snowboard World Cup medal in Calgary. Liam's win adds to another impressive performance at the Youth Olympics in January, where he won two bronze medals and one silver.

Along with Liam, Parry Sound's Megan Oldham won bronze in women's slopestyle at the World Cup Freestyle Skiing event in February. This follows a gold medal win that I mentioned in the House last year.

After being sidelined by injury for a year, Dara Howell of Huntsville is back on the freestyle skiing circuit. She started the season with a bronze medal in big air, and is currently ranked sixth in the world in that discipline.

Last but not least, I want to congratulate Aidan Dudas from Parry Sound, who, along with his team, won a gold for Canada at the 2020 World Junior Ice Hockey Championships. As a forward, Aidan contributed greatly to his team's success, assisting with two goals in Canada's semi-final win. He also played a key defensive role when the team was on penalty kill.

These athletes exemplify the world-class talent that Parry Sound–Muskoka and Ontario bring to the world of sport. I hope that their success will inspire other young men and women to take on snowboarding, freestyle skiing, hockey and any other sport that they may be interested in. Congratulations to all.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Suze Morrison: Speaker, 650 Parliament Street is a high-rise rental building in St. James Town that's home to over 1,500 tenants. On August 21, 2018, the building experienced a large electrical fire as a result of faulty and poorly maintained electrical systems. Residents had to be evacuated, and I want to give thanks to the first responders, to the city of Toronto and to the Red Cross for the immediate supports that they provided in the wake of that crisis.

For the past 18 months, 1,500 of my constituents have been displaced from their homes. For many of my colleagues, a population of 1,500 might be the size of entire towns in your ridings. Imagine an entire town being evacuated for a year and a half.

Today, I'm happy to report that tenants have started moving back home, and to those tenants, from the bottom of my heart, welcome home.

I would also like to thank our local city councillor, Kristyn Wong-Tam, and her office for their tireless work supporting these tenants.

I want to be clear: This fire never should have happened in the first place. This is why I tabled the St. James Town Act, which, if passed, would require that landlords of high-rise apartment buildings maintain reserve funds for repairs, the same way that condos are already required to. Landlords would be better prepared to handle significant maintenance and repairs, and tenants would be better protected.

I hope my colleagues on both sides of the House will support the St. James Town Act. In the midst of a housing crisis, we must do everything in our power to protect tenants and to ensure the safety of our aging stock of high-rise apartment buildings across Ontario.

COLDEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise today to thank everyone who participated in the Coldest Night of the Year walk on February 22. Across Canada, 23,648 walkers raised over

\$5.9 million for charities that serve hungry, homeless and hurting people in our communities.

In Guelph, I joined 344 walkers to raise \$98,845 for HOPE House, an organization that works to alleviate poverty by building community. I want to thank everyone who supports HOPE House, and organizations like HOPE House, for the good work that they do.

I see we have members of Chicken Farmers of Ontario in the gallery today, and I want to thank them for their donations of food to HOPE House.

I agree with many of the walkers who told me they want the provincial government to do more to support the homeless and to support people with mental health challenges. In Guelph-Wellington, 43% of the people experiencing homelessness report having a mental illness. But the wait-list for supportive housing continues to grow.

I urge the government to make yesterday's mental health announcement meaningful by allocating money in the budget for supportive housing to serve the most vulnerable in our communities.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I rise in the House today to share how our government has been working hard to build long-term-care beds across Ontario, including building and upgrading over 700 new beds in Niagara.

Under the previous Liberal government, in office for 15 years, at times backed by the NDP, only 152 long-term-care beds were built in Niagara. Under the previous Progressive Conservative government, almost 700 long-term-care beds were built. This clearly demonstrates our party's and government's commitment to long-term care. When it comes to building beds across the province and in Niagara, we've lived up to our promises and continue to follow through with our pledge to the growing number of seniors who require care.

This is why our government has created a ministry dedicated to long-term care. It's why our government is investing an additional \$72 million this year in addition to the \$1.75 billion allocated to build and update 30,000 new long-term-care beds across the province.

Our government has committed to a great number of projects in Niagara, with an estimated 300 beds, including: the Westhills Care Centre and the Linhaven long-term-care home projects in St. Catharines; the Foyer Richelieu and the Royal Rose Place projects in Welland; the Pleasant Manor project in Virgil, as well as new beds allocated to Shalom Manor.

These new long-term-care-bed allocations are part of our government's commitment to adding 15,000 long-term-care beds over the next five years and part of our transformational strategy to end hallway health care in Ontario.

I want my constituents to know that I will continue advocating for more long-term-care beds in Niagara, including future projects—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Members' statements?

PLAY FOR A CURE

Mr. Taras Natyshak: This morning, I want to recognize a great initiative in Windsor and Essex county that combines our shared love of hockey with the incredibly generous spirit of the people back home. Play for a Cure is a Pro-Am tournament that challenges hockey teams on the ice and in the community to raise money to support cancer research locally.

Players are challenged with a fundraising goal in order to improve their draft position to choose the former pro who will join their team for the tournament. It's pretty neat. Former NHLers like Paul Coffey, Adam Graves, Al Iafrate have generously donated their time to make this event a huge success.

Play for a Cure raises funds to support initiatives in both patient care and treatment care directly in the Windsor-Essex region. You can learn more by visiting playforacure.ca. They have a draft party on March 26 and the game takes place at the Vollmer recreational complex in LaSalle on March 27.

I want to congratulate the hard work of the event chair, Jeff Casey, who is just an incredible champion for this issue, the organizers, the sponsors and the donors for all their efforts. Congratulations to the teams' research fund: Bello Metal; Kingsville Brewery, my friend Mark Muzzin, who has made a donation to his team; and the LIUNATICS, the members of LIUNA Local 625.

I wish I was playing. It sounds like a ton of fun. But we certainly wish them well. We know it's a great cause. Congratulations, and go get 'em, boys.

BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS

Mr. Mike Harris: It is a pleasure to rise today and welcome Big Brothers Big Sisters here to Queen's Park.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is comprised of over 100 agencies, serving more than 1,100 communities across this country. Think back to a role model you had when you were growing up. Maybe it was a friend, a family member or a neighbour who helped shape you into the person you are today. I count myself lucky to have had strong mentors and individuals who gave me guidance when times were tough.

The mission and vision of Big Brothers Big Sisters is to provide all young people the opportunity to realize their full potential through mentorship relationships.

Our Attorney General is a former chair of his local Big Brothers Big Sisters, and I'm sure he would say it was an incredibly rewarding experience.

Last year, over 20,000 young Ontarians benefited from a mentor from the Big Brothers Big Sisters in Ontario. Locally in Waterloo region, 550 incredible volunteers mentored 1,300 youth last year. But even still, there are thousands of children and youth in Ontario still waiting for that mentoring opportunity.

Strong mentorship leads to remarkably better outcomes for children, and every child deserves the opportunity to have the confidence to go after their dream.

I would encourage you all to drop by room 228 following question period today to connect with some of the volunteers and administrators, and if you can, consider donating some of your time to become a "big" for a child in your community.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Once again, I'll remind members on both sides of the House that we are currently in members' statements. I would ask them to keep their private conversations quiet so as to allow the member who has the floor to make their statement without interruption, and I remind both sides of the House that we need to do this.

1030

HEART AND STROKE FOUNDATION

Mrs. Robin Martin: Today is Heart and Stroke's annual advocacy day at Queen's Park, called Heart at the Park. Representatives from Heart and Stroke will be here on behalf of their 15,000 volunteers and 490,000 donors across Ontario, meeting with members to discuss several important issues, including their Restart a Heart campaign.

Cardiac arrest can strike anyone, anywhere, any time, at any age without warning. In Canada, there are 35,000 cardiac arrests every year, and less than 10% of people who have out-of-hospital cardiac arrests survive. Because of its sudden unexpected nature, every second counts when a cardiac arrest occurs. When an automated external defibrillator and CPR are used, survival is more than doubled. Defibrillators are easy-to-use, portable devices and will only shock when needed.

I have had the opportunity to work closely with Heart and Stroke on my private member's bill, Bill 141, which, if passed, would ensure that defibrillators in public places are available and accessible in an emergency, and their support and advocacy on the issue has been invaluable.

But as individuals, we can all do more. Heart and Stroke will be hosting a reception this evening in the legislative dining room from 5:30 to 7:30 and will include drop-in CPR training. I encourage all members to join them there.

WEARING OF PINS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I am advised that the member for Eglinton-Lawrence has a point of order she wishes to raise.

Mrs. Robin Martin: I seek unanimous consent of the House for members to be permitted to wear Heart and Stroke Foundation pins.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Martin is seeking unanimous consent of the House for members to be permitted to wear Heart and Stroke Foundation pins. Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have in the House today Andrea Donkers from the Chicken Farmers

of Ontario, who's from my riding, as well as representatives of Big Brothers Big Sisters from Wellington–Halton Hills. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to recognize two London North Centre constituents this morning. I'd like to welcome Dr. Peter Donahue, the director of the School of Social Work at King's University College, as well as Janet Tufts, the executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of London and Area. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Mike Harris: I also have a constituent here from the Chicken Farmers of Ontario today: Wendy Lantz, all the way from Kitchener-Conestoga.

Ms. Doly Begum: I'd like to welcome Youth Employment Services here to the Legislature. We have Alan Ott, manager; Kofi Achampong, member of the board of directors; career counsellor Emma Ricci; as well as members D'Angelo, Rhojay, Nicole, Andrea, Amira, Aprajita and Neer.

Mr. John Fraser: We have a very special person here today: Lauren Kennedy is here with the Chicken Farmers of Ontario and their women in leadership program. More importantly, Lauren was a page here, I don't know how many years ago, and she worked for me, so I just want to welcome her back. Lauren, welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Amy Fee: I'd like to welcome Julie Phillips from Big Brothers Big Sisters of Waterloo Region.

Also, my executive assistant, Grace Camara, and my daughter Irene are here to visit today as well.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I rise once again to introduce the family of York South–Weston's page, Irma: Her mother, Irma Saldana Ramirez, and father, Oscar Mendoza, are here again. They are joined by uncle Santos Arnoldo Flores, family friend Felipe Ramos, who is also a former page here at the Legislature, and his mother, Livia Maria Andrade Ramos Gaertner. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'd like to introduce two of my constituents who are in the west members' gallery: Andre Nichol and Janice Folk-Dawson. Janice also serves as the executive vice president of the Ontario Federation of Labour. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: As we lead up to International Women's Day, I'd like to welcome the following Chicken Farmers of Ontario members who are at Queen's Park today celebrating women in agriculture—I know some have been noted already: Sue Munroe, Kathryn Goodish, Carolyn Cornelissen, Wendy Lantz, Krista Lansink, Andrea Donkers, Laurie Weber, Lauren Kennedy, Melissa Devries, Donna Jebb, Andrea Veldhuizen and Penny van den Ouweland.

We also have Jennifer Huberts, Jeannette Poole, Inge Koskamp, Janet O'Rourke, Gina Benjamins, Kory Preston, Nicole Bernard and Patricia Shanahan; and two men who have joined the ladies today, Rob Dougans and Ed Benjamins.

Miss Monique Taylor: I would like to welcome Amy Moledzki, Angela Brandt, Amanda Mooyer, and Michau van Speyk, all from the Ontario Autism Coalition. Welcome back to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: I'd like to introduce Laurie Weber, from Chicken Farmers of Ontario, from the riding of Cambridge; and one of my constituents, Julie Phillips, from Big Brothers Big Sisters of Waterloo Region, also from Cambridge.

Mr. Chris Glover: From Heart and Stroke, I want to welcome Brenda Moore; and from Youth Employment Services, I want to welcome Aprajita Mukherjee, Hofsa Abshir, Jessica Oliver, Shemeka Lennard, Amira Djerbouha, Andrea Okocha-Ray, Neer Mistry, James Rhojay Ahtwain and D'Angelo Gordon. Welcome to the Legislature.

Hon. Bill Walker: I'm pleased to welcome Krista Lansink from my great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound to Queen's Park. Krista is here today with the Chicken Farmers of Ontario. Welcome, Krista.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to welcome the Ontario Federation of Agriculture to the House today and thank them for a great breakfast this morning.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: I'd like to welcome Angela Bactol, who is a Ryerson student doing a political placement in my office. Welcome.

Mr. Jamie West: I'd like to introduce Colleen Dietrich Sisson from the Educational Assistants Association.

From the OFL, I'd like to welcome president Patty Coates; secretary-treasurer Ahmad Gaied; executive vice-president Janice Folk-Dawson; and executive director Rob Halpin, who are all here to speak about their challenge to Bill 124.

As well, I'd like to introduce Chandra Pasma of CUPE, and Stephanie Taylor, a paramedic and CUPE member, who are at Queen's Park for the release of a report on the serious pressure on paramedic services in Ontario.

Mrs. Nina Tangri: I'd like to welcome Joseph Moodey, the proud father of Hannah Moodey, who is our page captain today. Welcome, Joseph.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I'd like to welcome Andrea Veldhuizen, Melissa DeVries and Catriona Decaire, who are here today with Chicken Farmers of Ontario for their women's leadership program, from my riding of Niagara West. Welcome to the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The time for introduction of visitors has expired.

I will remind members once again that the standing orders strictly say that introductions should be introducing your guest, perhaps introducing the riding they're from, as well as the organization they might represent, and no other comments.

QUESTION PERIOD

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question this morning is for the Premier.

For months, the Ford government insisted that larger class sizes and mandatory online learning would be welcomed by parents and educators, and parents and kids paid

the price. The Premier said it would make students more resilient. They hid reports in which parents, teachers and educators warned them it would not work, and they picked a fight that closed schools across Ontario.

Yesterday, the Minister of Education revised the government's position yet again.

But parents want to hear from the Premier that these cuts were a mistake and the government will be repealing them entirely. Will he do that today?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: Parents, students and teachers want a deal. We've put a great deal in front of them, and we'll see which way they go. Minister Lecce confirmed the major moves we've made at the table—massive, massive moves—to get the kids back into the classroom. It's a deal that keeps class sizes low, invests in special education and math, maintains full-day kindergarten, ensures merit is part of hiring, and keeps compensation increases reasonable.

What's more, Minister Lecce announced that parents will have a choice on online learning. I think that's going to grow organically. The kids are going to want to go online. So let's see what happens.

Most important, the unions have known about these moves for weeks, and yet they continue to escalate.

We want a deal to keep the kids in—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, with all due respect, the minister made the announcement at a podium, not at a bargaining table.

1040

The Ford government is frantically backpedalling in the face of overwhelming backlash from parents, teachers, students and school boards, all of whom have rejected the Premier's short-sighted and reckless classroom cuts.

But the Ford government has a long way to go if it wants to earn anyone's trust. The Premier could start today by acknowledging that he was wrong from the beginning and apologizing to parents, to students and to educators for the way that he has handled this mess.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Government side, come to order.

Premier to respond.

Hon. Doug Ford: Mr. Speaker, our Minister of Education has done an incredible, incredible job. For the first time in 50 years, the teachers' unions are being held accountable.

We support the hard-working front-line teachers. We talk to the front-line teachers who want to get back into the classroom and teach the students. That's their expertise. That's what we're doing, working day in and day out, to get a deal.

We've increased spending on education—\$1.2 billion. That's \$1.2 billion. We're investing \$3.1 billion in special education funding—the highest levels this province has ever seen in the history of this province. We've announced a four-year, \$200-million math strategy, Mr. Speaker, and we're going to continue doing everything we can to get the

teachers' union to sign a deal and put an end to this nonsense.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The fact remains, Speaker, that it's this government that created the nonsense in the first place.

The Conservatives spent months and months pretending that they were being reasonable. They said that everyday Ontarians were on board with their plans to fire thousands of teachers, to kick kids out of the classroom and force them onto the Internet, and to cram everyone else who was left into overcrowded, underfunded and crumbling schools.

Is the Ford government finally ready to admit that their failure to listen to parents led to the hot mess that we're in right now?

Interjections.

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

If this starts again as soon as I start the clock, I'll stand up again and stop the clock. We could be here until 12:30, 1 o'clock—your choice.

Start the clock. The Minister of Education to respond.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, it's time for a deal in this province, and we're taking action to deliver a deal for students in Ontario.

That's why yesterday, I was proud to put forth a pragmatic plan that heeds the perspective and advice of parents. In our announcement yesterday, we are ensuring that classroom sizes are effectively frozen for elementary and for high school students in Ontario. We are ensuring a 100% investment in special education to help the most vulnerable. We're protecting all-day kindergarten. We're ensuring that merit guides the hiring of new teachers in Ontario. And Speaker, yes, we are standing strong in the defence of a 1% fair increase for workers and for teachers.

This is a good deal. It's a program that's going to help students succeed. It's about time the teacher unions get to the table. Let's get this done.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my next question is also for the Premier—but I do have to say, it is long past time for a deal. It's not time for a deal; it's long past time for a deal in this province.

This government spent the last year making life worse for parents, for teachers and for students. They don't get to take a victory lap now that they've been shamed into backing down on the cuts that they never should have put on the table in the first place.

This government's changes to class sizes and cuts to school boards threw the lives of everyday families across this province into chaos. Thousands of teachers were laid off. Some still haven't found work. Some went from full-time to occasional part-time work.

Why did this government care so little about the damage they caused that they had to be dragged, kicking

and screaming, into doing the right thing by the kids of this province?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Response? Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Speaker, we're fighting to ensure that your son and your daughter are able to stay in school with a positive plan that ensures that every child in Ontario is given the investment they need to succeed. In this deal, a plan we proposed yesterday, we are listening. We have ensured that classroom sizes are effectively frozen. We're ensuring that special education support is a 100% annualized investment to help those in need. We're giving an opt-out. We're putting parents in the driver's seat—not the unions, not a politician—the parents of this province to decide what's best for their child.

This is a positive plan, and the time is now. Enough with the dithering. Enough with the delay. Get to the table. Let's get this done.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Oh, wow. What a delusional government, Speaker. What a delusional minister, that the Ford government can't expect to get praised by teachers, by parents or by students for taking six months to admit that they were wrong. The time for them to listen was during the consultation that they utterly ignored. But thanks to their stubbornness, students across the province had to deal with thousands of their classes being cancelled.

The government knew that their plan was putting students' graduation and their very futures at risk. They knew this all along, and continued down their ill-informed path. Will this government apologize to the students, apologize to the parents and apologize to the education workers, the teachers, in this province, whom they went out of their way to attack?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Minister of the Environment, come to order. Member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, come to order. Member for Kitchener–Conestoga, come to order. Everybody else, come to order.

Start the clock. Minister of Education to reply.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We will never apologize for ensuring that merit guides hiring in this province for new educators in Ontario. We're not going to apologize. We are not going to apologize for standing strong in the defence of a 1% fair increase for wages and for benefits. We believe that this is the right thing to do. What we also believe is that the program we've unveiled is absolutely consistent with the priorities of parents.

Now there's a choice before the unions, and I'm asking to do two things: one, during this period of negotiation, given the policy change of government, the unions should cancel their strikes. I hope, in the supplementary, the member opposite will stand with us and agree that strikes should be cancelled during a period of negotiation. That's a yes or no to the member opposite.

The second point in my request to the unions is to accept that we need to see incremental movements when it comes to merit-based hiring. I want the best teacher to be at the front of your child's class. It's a mission we're on. We're going to work hard at the table to get this deal done.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It is unbelievable that this minister continues to behave the way he has behaved all along that has created the problem that we now have in front of us and that parents, teachers, school boards and kids, most importantly, have had to deal with for months and months and months on end. The fact is, this government has made a mess of our education system. They won't fix it with hastily arranged press conferences.

The Premier can take a first step today. Make it clear that all of his cuts are cancelled—not amended; cancelled completely. Get a team back to the table with a minister who's actually serious about getting a deal, not just getting attention. Will the Premier do that?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Just let the record be clear: When given the opportunity to affirm that the opposition stands against strikes during the period of negotiation, there was no response—silence from the member opposite. Parents want action. They want the teachers at the table. Parents and students deserve every party to be at the table to deliver a deal that's good for students, and that's exactly what we're going to do, by keeping classroom sizes low, by ensuring merit-based hiring and by ensuring we stand strong in the defence of a 1% fair increase for public servants in this province.

The member opposite mentioned school boards and their concerns. Let me read what the Ontario Public School Boards' Association said yesterday: "In our view, this is a positive development."

The fact is, school boards, parents, students and education workers acknowledge themselves that this is a positive path to deliver a deal. The time is now for the unions to cancel the strike and get to the table. Let's get this done.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier. Yesterday, the Minister of Education tried a new spin on his disastrous plan to cut classrooms and on the government's terrible mandatory e-learning plan, and it is not hard to see why. Thanks to the consultation documents that we released this week and that this government tried to bury, it is plain to see just how massively unpopular this plan is among parents and students and educators. We are talking about 220 hours of in-person learning replaced by computers. We're talking about an average of 35 kids in each online class, and we know that could go higher. And now the government thinks making parents jump through hoops to spare their kids will make it somehow more palatable.

Speaker, instead of putting the onus on parents to opt their kids out from this terrible plan, why not just scrap the plan for mandatory online learning now?

1050

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The members opposite have asserted that this discussion should happen at the table. We agree, and it has. In fact, yesterday, when one teachers' union president was posed the question, "Did you know about the classroom size reduction that the government is proposing?" they asserted no. I have confirmed, and the media now have access to letters from February 24 where it says, without reservation, that class sizes, excluding online learning, shall not exceed 23. The fact is, we have been transparent with our intention to deliver a deal that keeps classroom sizes low and ensures investments return to the front of class, that ensures that we maintain the line on 1%. But it enables us to keep classroom sizes low.

Mr. Speaker, to the question of online learning: You or anyone else is not in the best position to make a decision when it comes to a child's education. Their parents should make that decision. We believe in that principle, and parents should be in the driver's seat on that.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: The minister is spinning so hard he's going to lift off.

Back to the Premier: Preparing our kids for the future should not mean pushing them into isolating online courses at the expense of in-person learning. For months, people have been trying desperately to understand: Why is this government refusing to back down from a scheme that so clearly jeopardizes student success?

Well, Mr. Speaker, a private panel this afternoon may shed some light. At the Canadian Club later today, a group of private e-learning companies are gathering in Yorkville to discuss business opportunities in our public education system. Will the Premier tell us today who stands to profit from this e-learning mess you're forcing on our kids?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: This government believes parents know best; not politicians, not bureaucrats and not union leaders in the province of Ontario. The plan that we brought forward ensures that students get to make that decision. We put them in the driver's seat.

Speaker, over the past 24 hours, I've heard from many parents, many students and teachers themselves. I want to speak to you about one example: Giovanna, who reached out to me. She said, "As a parent of the system for 12 years, I can confidently say it is broken—so many investments made that never went to [our] kids. We need these investments to help support kids directly.... Let us start teaching for the century we are in, not the past. I do not want the status quo; I want change. I want my kids in class!" Giovanna, this government agrees.

JOB CREATION

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: My question is to the Premier. Premier, over two years ago, my riding, my home of Barrie, was leading the province, and the country, in the wrong way. In April 2018, Barrie had the highest

unemployment rate in all of Canada. That was followed in May by the highest unemployment rate in Ontario. This left families without hope and with a loss of the dignity that comes with a job. It meant increased hardship and uncertainty for many community business leaders that were uncertain about their fiscal future. Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, there is hope yet again. Since our government has come to office, Barrie has turned around, especially when it comes to job creation.

Could the Premier share with this House our government's actions and the positive results that we're having in Barrie?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank our all-star member from Barrie—Innisfil. The plans that the mayor and our MPP have up there are absolutely staggering. I've got to tell you: In 2018—yes, before we got elected—unemployment just shot through the roof right across this province, losing 300,000 jobs. The good news is, my friends, in November and December of 2019, Barrie created the environment for 2,700 new jobs, so congratulations. StatsCan says 900 new jobs came in January 2020. I'm so proud to say that unemployment is the lowest in decades now, below the Ontario average of 5%. They're doing an incredible job, creating new jobs.

As a matter of fact, I'm going to just quote Mayor Jeff Lehman, who said, "We have seen strong hiring locally; that strength has come from the manufacturing"—where we lost 300,000 jobs between the NDP and the Liberals—"and health care sectors." Our plan—

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

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Back to the Premier: Premier, you are right about the tremendous turnaround happening in my riding. The numbers are truly showing the potential.

I want to take this opportunity to highlight an innovative manufacturing company in my riding. SBS Drivetec is the first North American subsidiary of a German-based automotive parts company called Burger Group, which opened its operations in Barrie. I was proud to announce that they received over \$89,000 in investment from our government to help them operate and expand.

Our government is creating an environment where businesses can focus on what they do best: developing great products and building successful companies and successful communities. Can the Premier share with this House the investments we've made in Barrie and the positive impact they've had all across province?

Hon. Doug Ford: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank our great member. The investments we made in Barrie—we invested over \$20 million in 11 new transportation routes and also invested in 30 new buses. That's \$20 million back into Barrie.

The economy is very simple. The way you generate jobs is by making sure you take the burden off the backs of companies—companies that are debating whether to stay in Canada, in Ontario, or go down to the United States. We've made those concessions, Mr. Speaker. We made sure we created an environment, by lowering the

WSIB premiums by 47%, by making sure that we can have the accelerated write-offs of \$3.8 billion—76% of all jobs in Canada were created right here in Ontario.

We lowered the small business tax—because we know the vast majority of people are employed by small businesses—by 8.75%. We've cut the red tape and regulations by \$400 million—

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

LICENCE PLATES

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. A month ago, the Premier unveiled, with great fanfare, his brand new, shiny PC Party-blue licence plates that he claimed would be more durable and more effective. Speaker, even I had faith that if there were one thing that this Premier could get right, it's making licence plates. But clearly, a lot can happen in a month.

After the government initially denied that there was a problem, the Premier finally backtracked and said that his new plates would be recalled. Then he signed a non-disclosure agreement with 3M so that Ontarians would be kept in the dark.

Speaker, will the Premier today do the right thing and table all the costs to Ontarians for issuing his new plates, including all the shipping—

Hon. Doug Ford: There is no cost. Zip, zero.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: You'll be able to answer in one second—handling and manufacturing costs?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Government and Consumer Services to reply.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I want to be crystal clear in all of this. We actually listened to the concerns of Ontarians. We have taken their feedback very seriously, we have shared our plan forward, and we're delivering very diligently a plan that is going to work and reflect the feedback that we heard from Ontarians. Because of that, we're very proud of the path we're on, and we certainly look forward to updating you as the plan progresses.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Speaker, thanks to the Premier's non-disclosure agreement with 3M, we have no way of knowing what the Premier and 3M have agreed to in order to make the Premier's embarrassment go away. That's why today we've written to the Auditor General, asking her to conduct a full review of this mess. In her role as Auditor General, she'll be able to review the contract's details without revealing any sensitive information about the contract.

Speaker, will the Premier do the right thing, back our call to the auditor and fully provide all documentation to the auditor so that she can do the work that Ontarians are asking for?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Again, Speaker, on the path forward, our government has responded, our vendor has responded and we've listened to concerns.

1100

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: My question is for the Minister of Education. Yesterday, the minister announced that the government had finally decided to listen to reason. The government's new position is a significant backdown, and credit for that backdown goes to all the clear voices of students, parents and educators, who made it clear that raising class sizes, taking 5,000 to 10,000 adults out of schools across the province and forcing students to take online courses when no jurisdiction has demonstrated that mandatory online learning works for all students were all bad ideas.

The minister yesterday made it sound as though he was withdrawing all of those egregious policies, but, in fact, that is not the case. There are already hundreds of fewer adults in schools across the province this year than last year, and the move to an average class size of 23 students will further reduce the number of teachers in our schools, which in turn will mean thousands of fewer course options for students.

Why is it still the position of this government that students in Ontario's high schools should do without thousands of courses because of this government's cuts?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Speaker, how is it the position of that member to consent to a hiring of new educators in Ontario 100% based on union seniority? How is that conceivable and consistent with the best interests of quality education in the province? That is the fundamental question, I think, parents, principals and education leaders would like an answer to.

But this government seeks to remedy the failures of the past by bringing forth a plan that ensures that merit, diversity and quality guide the hiring of new educators in Ontario. With respect to teachers in Ontario, we're ensuring that they're at the front of the class and we're ensuring that we're able to keep classroom sizes low by ensuring we hold the line on the 1% wage and benefit ask.

We want to see a deal. The time for delay is no longer. We have to see action. Parents have seen 300 days of bargaining, and our government made a move yesterday to deliver a positive outcome that ensures every child remains in class. The time for a deal is now.

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

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: Although the government has somewhat changed its tune on the mandatory aspect of the two online courses, the two courses will still be the default unless parents opt their students out. Now, Mr. Speaker, as a mom, my experience was that my children worked with their guidance counsellors and were quite capable of putting together a plan for their learning. I can only imagine, when my kids were in grade 11 or 12, if I or their dad had chosen to intervene.

In response to the announcement, the Ontario Students Trustees' Association has said, "We are still troubled by parents having to opt their students out of the e-learning

course mandate, as opposed to high school students being able to make this decision for their own education.”

Will the minister take the voices of these students into account, and will he and his team now put together a real proposal to take to the negotiating table?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, the nanny-state principles of the Liberal Party are clearly alive and well. But we believe, as Progressive Conservatives, that parents know best, and that’s why we’re giving them that decision. We’re arming them with the information. We’re empowering them and their students to make the best decision for their child. That’s why we’re providing an opt-out. We’re providing them with that optionality that I think they deserve.

This plan keeps classroom sizes low. It ensures merit-based hiring. It ensures spec-ed support is at 100%. It’s a good deal. It’s a deal that should be implemented. I call on the unions: Cancel the strikes, get to the table, and let’s get this done.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: My question is for the Minister of Health. This is a government that listens to Ontarians. For years, Ontarians have been asking for a plan that will properly address mental health and addictions. While 1.4 million Ontarians experience a mental health or addiction challenge each year, care has too often been out of reach. As the minister made clear yesterday during her announcement, our government knows how important it is for Ontarians and their families to have access to high-quality services. That’s why our government has introduced a new plan for a comprehensive and connected mental health and addiction system.

Can the minister tell us about the work that went into this mental health and addiction plan?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member from Brampton West for this question.

Yesterday, the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and I were very pleased to launch Roadmap to Wellness, our government’s plan to build a mental health and addiction system in Ontario. This announcement follows extensive engagement with people with lived experience, families, caregivers, front-line organizations, researchers and first responders.

With this plan, we are enhancing the availability and quality of community-based mental health and addiction services. We are improving access, finding innovative solutions like the Mindability program, expanding existing services and improving the quality of these services. Our government has brought forward a plan that will ensure that all Ontarians receive the care and support they need, when and where they need it.

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

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you to the minister for her answer. It is clear that the Roadmap to Wellness provides a clear path towards offering Ontarians easier access

to high-quality care and support in communities across the province.

I’m glad that the minister mentioned Mindability. This program is the first of its kind in Canada offering therapy for Ontarians struggling with depression or anxiety, two of the most common mental health issues. I’m happy that this innovative new care option will be funded just like OHIP and made available for no out-of-pocket cost to patients.

Can the minister tell us more about Mindability and some of the other parts of our government’s plan to better connect Ontarians with mental health and addiction services?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: I’d like to thank the member from Brampton West for his question. I want to begin by thanking our Premier, Doug Ford, and our Minister of Health and Deputy Premier, Christine Elliott, for the great work that they’ve done. The media this morning was talking about the strategy and said that this is a game-changer for the province. I couldn’t agree more.

Our government is providing \$20 million in annual funding to launch Mindability, which will provide accessible, evidence-based cognitive behavioural therapy to Ontarians. Through Mindability, individuals receive an assessment from a trained clinician and are offered a therapy program that addresses their unique needs. It’s important to note that Mindability includes face-to-face, group and individual therapy as well as online modules, work books, telephone coaching, and clinical counselling. The Roadmap to Wellness will also expand community-based mental health and addiction services to improve the supports available to Ontarians.

AMBULANCE SERVICES

Mr. Jeff Burch: Speaker, through you to the Premier: Today front-line paramedics released a shocking report showing that ambulance shortages are on the rise in Ontario. Because of years of frozen health budgets under the Liberal government, there are more and more hospital off-load delays while emergency calls skyrocket. Instead of providing the necessary funding to fix Ontario’s emergency services, the Ford government is busy looking for ways to cut. Front-line ambulance workers make it clear: “Emergency medical services need adequate funding or the pressure on the system will increase until it reaches a breaking point.” Can the Premier tell us why he is plowing ahead with cutting and merging Ontario’s emergency services?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Patient safety is our top priority, and we are working with emergency services to provide better services to Ontarians, improving the dispatch system so that emergency services can get to patients faster. We want to enhance what’s already happening out there. We have Mr. Jim Pine, who, as I think everyone knows here, is working with our public health units and

working with emergency paramedics and so on to make sure that we can enhance the services and better the quality of services available to all Ontarians. Mr. Pine is continuing with his consultations regionally. We are awaiting the report of his recommendations, which will be expressive of everything that he has heard from emergency service providers.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question? The member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. Joel Harden: The paramedics' report is actually very clear. I invite the minister any time to visit the Civic hospital campus to see the backlog of ambulances that can't unload because of the cuts. It is putting Ontarians at risk. Increasingly, when they call 911, there's a chance there will be no ambulance available. And do you know what, Speaker? Despite the laughing I hear from the opposite side, it's not a funny matter. Yesterday, in Ottawa, there were 19 ambulance crews who were unable to respond. They were stuck waiting at the Ottawa general hospital. I don't find that funny.

Let me be clear: Ontario paramedics are doing their very best despite these circumstances. So I have a serious question for the Premier or the Deputy Premier: Are you going to be prepared today to tell front-line paramedic staff who are here with us that this is unacceptable and this has to change?

Hon. Christine Elliott: This is a very serious matter. We take it very seriously. We are working very hard to deal with that situation. The situation in Ottawa, I know, is particularly of concern. We want to make sure that we can have the right people responding to care at the right time. We have put over \$16 million to assist municipalities with funding for dedicated nurses to receive ambulance patients and return paramedics to the community faster.

1110

This is an issue that is also creating hallway health care. We know that it is. We are working very hard to make sure that our paramedics can be back out on the road, doing the services that they are intended to do, while we are still able to safely receive patients into the emergency departments in the hospital.

It is something we are actively working on now. I thank you for the question.

SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Health. Minister, I know that you're familiar with Surrey Place—it's just a stone's throw from here—and you know that they provide specialized care for persons living with developmental disabilities.

Since 2006, they've been receiving funding from the Ministry of Health for the Developmental Disabilities Primary Care Program, which helps primary care physicians meet the very unique needs of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. That funding ended in April 2019. I know that Surrey Place put forward

a proposal in advance of last year's budget, and they heard nothing from the ministry.

Speaker, through you: I'm asking the minister to support this program, which serves a very vulnerable population with very unique needs.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for your question. We are aware of the proposal from Surrey Place. It's also incumbent on all governments to plan for the future and consider how demographics are changing. That's what we're doing, and had the previous government understood that, the sector would be in a better place today.

Minister Smith has talked to families, adults with developmental disabilities and our service providers across the province about how we can do better for those that depend upon these services. What has been clear in these conversations is that many of these families are facing the same challenges today that they faced 10 or even 15 years ago.

Our ministry is also connecting with our housing sector partners and community stakeholders to expand housing options for people with developmental disabilities. We will continue our conversations with individuals with lived experience and service providers in the coming months as we continue to explore new ways to improve supports for the families and individuals that we serve.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you for the answer. That wasn't the answer, I think, that families needed to hear.

This is a program that's \$450,000 a year—\$225,000 from the Ministry of Health and \$225,000 from your ministry. They do incredible work. This work is a centre of excellence for primary care physicians.

People living with developmental disabilities have very unique needs. They're hard to serve in primary care, in palliative care—in any medical setting. This work is critical to all Ontarians. It's supporting physicians. It needs to continue. It's just that simple.

What I would like to hear in the answer is that you're going to connect with Surrey Place, talk to them about the work they do, and work with them to continue that work. It's really important work.

I ask, Minister, that you, your staff or your ministry speak directly to Surrey Place and help them continue this—

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: If the member from Nepean—Carleton could let me finish the question—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Stop the clock. The member for Carleton, come to order. The Minister of Heritage, come to order.

I'm going to give the member for Ottawa South a few seconds to place his question.

Mr. John Fraser: I'm asking you to make that call. It's a serious question. It's on behalf of people whose voices

are really hard to hear. So I'm asking the minister to listen to those voices.

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I agree with the member that this is a really important issue, that we need to serve people with developmental challenges better than we have in the past.

The work that is being done at Surrey Place is extraordinary. I can tell you that we have reached an agreement with the Ministry of Health for an expansion of services at Surrey Place. The agreement is between the Ontario government, Surrey Place and the Ontario Medical Association, in conjunction with the physicians at Surrey Place.

Over the next three years, the agreement will provide funding to expand physician services. The agreement is expected to stabilize the physician complement by supporting the recruitment and retention of physicians. This will increase access to care and address service gaps for an underserved and very vulnerable population.

Of course, we will continue our conversations with Surrey Place, in conjunction with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.

FIRST RESPONDERS

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is to the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues. First responders play a vital role in our community. Police officers, firefighters, paramedics and corrections officers frequently risk their lives to save ours. It's a tough job that requires compassion, commitment and understanding.

I had the privilege of witnessing this first-hand when I took part in a ride-along with Hamilton police officers and in training exercises with members of Hamilton's fire department. They are an incredible group of people.

Can the minister please tell us what she is doing to ensure that more women pursue careers as first responders?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to my friend the wonderful member from Flamborough–Glanbrook for that great question.

This past week I had the privilege of meeting with Inspector Veronica Eaton, who is the first female detachment commander for Orillia OPP, and several other female officers in my riding of Simcoe North. These women are blazing the trail for other young women by demonstrating their bravery, passion and leadership every day in our community.

Speaker, women and girls across Ontario deserve to know that there is not only a place for them on the front lines, but an open invitation. We are seeing more and more women join the police force and firefighting services and becoming paramedics. It is inspiring to see this increase every single day, and we want young women to be aware of these growing opportunities so they are encouraged to follow their passions.

We stand with the female first responders across our province. For the good of our province, these women

serve, protect and support our communities, and we thank them for their continued service.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: My supplementary question is to the Solicitor General. As the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues noted, women play an integral role as first responders on the front line of each of our communities, as police officers and fire-service representatives, as corrections officers and in paramedic services. I'm encouraged that the associate minister's commitment to supporting women in their pursuit of careers as first responders builds off strong women trailblazers in leadership roles.

Can the Solicitor General share how these women who serve on the front line are taking the lead in keeping our communities safe?

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

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you to the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook. This is an important issue, particularly in the lead-up to International Women's Day.

The member is correct: Women are taking the lead in community safety across Ontario. No matter where you look, the examples are everywhere, whether it's Kim Greenwood, who is the Barrie chief of police and past president of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, or whether it's fire chief Cynthia Ross Tustin, who is the chief at the Essa fire station and the president of the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs. Felecia Hooper, superintendent of the Ontario Correctional Institute, is one of the many women superintendents at Ontario's correctional facilities and in senior leadership roles in correctional services.

Whether it's keeping local communities safe or tackling large, province-wide crimes like human trafficking, our women on the front line are doing their job and excelling.

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Biosecurity and the security of farm families are incredibly important to the food supply of this province and to the people of this province who produce our food.

In a few minutes we're going to be voting on Bill 156, the—what's it called?

Ms. Sara Singh: Security from trespass.

Mr. John Vanthof: The security from trespass act. Can the minister outline what funding has been attached to this act for things like training farmers how to de-escalate a situation in a case of a citizen's arrest?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to reply.

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: I thank the member opposite for the question.

Mr. Speaker, we've been hearing for some time that farmers no longer feel safe in their homes or on their farms. I'm proud to say that our government has heard

these concerns and is taking action with this bill. That's why we're proposing legislation that, if passed, would keep Ontario farmers, their families, agri-food workers and farm animals safe by reducing the likelihood of trespassing on farms and processing facilities.

1120

People have a right to participate in legal protests, but this does not include trespassing on farms or interfering with trucks transporting livestock.

Mr. Speaker, when someone trespasses on a farm they are unlikely to be aware of the sensitive biosecurity protocol in place. We trust our farmers to maintain some of the safest food standards in the world. It's time we supported them.

Our legislation is designed to keep animals safe and healthy and protect the integrity of our food supply. We stand with our farmers and we continue to stand with our farmers.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: I fully agree with the minister on how important biosecurity and protecting farm families is. That's why I am shocked that they say that they're taking action, but there is not one dime attached to this bill to train farmers how to de-escalate or to train police officers how important this is. There is not one dime.

Considering that this government cut the agriculture budget by \$225 million in the last budget—25%—the least they could have done is to put the funding in to actually help farmers protect biosecurity and protect their families. Why haven't they?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members, please take their seats. Order. Stop the clock. The government side has to come to order.

Start the clock. The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to reply.

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much for the supplementary question. I want to say I think, from the start of your question, that you realize how important biosecurity for our farms is. With that, I can assume that right after question period, you'll cast a vote to pass this bill so we can get that job done.

One of the things we didn't hear in our consultation from our agriculture community was that they needed more training to deal with the situation as it was. They needed the situation to be changed. When they call for help today, law enforcement comes, but they can't do anything because they don't have the tools to fix the problem. This bill will help with that.

I really appreciate his support for this bill, and we look forward, in a few minutes, that you will get up and say, "I support that bill."

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Mr. Speaker, it has been some time since our government has put forth Bill

156. Farm trespassing has been an issue farmers have been facing for many years, with increasing concern.

Being educated about food in our grocery stores is essential. Too few people think about how it gets there and the sorts of measures our farmers take to make sure our food is safe. Farmers have felt like a lone voice for too long.

Can the minister please tell us about some of their concerns with the issue of farm trespassing?

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: I want to thank the member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington for that great question. Many of us here on both sides of the House have farms in our communities. We've heard from these farmers in our ridings who either fear or have directly faced trespassers on their farms. Trespassing is simply unacceptable.

Our government always has and always will protect the right to protest, but this isn't the right way to do it. Our government has passed excellent legislation with the PAWS Act, which provides the right tools in this province for dealing with animal cruelty concerns. If anyone has a concern, they don't have to go in. Call PAWS, and it will be fixed.

Farmers should not have to live in fear. Giving them a voice is proposed in this bill. We will continue enforcing it, and we hope that we get the opposition's vote to do that this afternoon.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you, Minister, for that excellent response.

I'm encouraged by his words and I'm also encouraged by the content of this proposed legislation. We've also heard from thousands of people who feel that this legislation will give them the peace of mind they need to carry on doing the great work that they do.

I echo the minister's sentiments: Trespassing on farms is never okay. Will the minister please share more about how this bill aims to deal with the issue of farm trespassing?

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you again to the member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington for that great supplementary question.

The health and safety of farmers and farm animals is at the heart of this legislation. We are striking the right balance between the right to protest and ensuring that farmers have the protections they need.

If this bill passed, it would set up protected animal zones which are subject to fines if trespassed. This also covers animal transportation vehicles. The measures in the bill include fines of up to \$15,000 for the first offence and \$25,000 for subsequent offences. We are confident that we have struck the right balance with this bill to keep the legal right to protest, and giving farmers and farm animals safety and peace of mind.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Doly Begum: My question is to the Premier.

After years of Liberal inaction, the cost of child care here in Ontario is out of control. Parents across province are often spending more on child care than their mortgages or their rent. Speaker, that's unacceptable.

Now we have learned that, thanks to the Conservatives, the cost of child care is going to increase even more. Conservative cuts mean that Peel region has had to cancel their reduced child care fees initiative—a program that many families rely on to make ends meet.

My question is: Why is this government making life more difficult for families in Peel and across this province?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I thank the member opposite for the question. I agree, after 15 years of the former Liberal government, indeed, the cost of living rose to the highest in the nation, and the cost of child care rose to the highest in the nation, notwithstanding that taxation rose. This is just unacceptable—energy costs rose.

Parents work harder and take home less. That is wrong. That's why I believe the people of this province turned to this political party to be put in charge, to manage, to ensure affordability is the cornerstone of our government's political mantra.

That's why, when it comes to child care, we're investing over \$1 billion to build 30,000 new child care spaces right across Ontario—in Scarborough and regions across our province. We are supporting, unlike the members opposite, a principle: putting more money in the pockets of moms and dads and parents of this province. A children's tax credit of up to 75% of child care expenses is going to help 300,000 people.

We are going to take action to make life affordable for parents in this province.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: Again, to the Premier: The investment that this government is making—the FAO report shows that that money is actually not going to help families in this province. It's not just parents in Peel whose lives are now more expensive thanks to the Liberal and Conservative failures: almost \$6 million cut in Toronto; another \$5 million in Halton; \$50 million across this province in child care cuts this year. This means that parents in places like Cornwall, Waterloo and London county are all paying more for child care under this government.

Families in Ontario shouldn't have to choose between broken promises and half measures from the Liberals or the reckless cuts from these Conservatives. So I ask the Premier again: Why does he think that the families should pay more for child care when they are already paying tens of thousands of dollars every year?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: In fact, this Premier believes families should pay less. That is why, unlike any political party in this province, we are supporting a tax credit directly to working parents, putting money in their pockets to make the best decision for their child's future—up to 75% of child care expenses; 30,000 new child care spaces.

I'm very proud that our government has helped to construct both independent as well as government spaces—20,000 in the last year alone.

1130

In Milton, 609 spaces are being built at the Bishop Reding Catholic Secondary School. In north Brampton, 658 new elementary school places are being placed, with child care rooms. There's approval of a 776-space elementary school with five child care rooms in northeast Oakville.

Speaker, we're putting money where it counts. We're making life affordable for parents. We're building child care spaces. That's a plan to make life affordable for parents in this province.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a question to the Associate Minister of Energy.

Ontarians are fortunate to live in a province with a reputation for developing experts and leaders in the ever-evolving field of the energy sector.

We know that women make up approximately 50% of the Canadian workforce. However, in the last 40 years, they've only made up 25% of the overall workforce in the electricity sector.

However, times are changing, and we are now seeing an increasing number of women choose the energy sector as a career path.

Could the Associate Minister of Energy please inform this House of the progress being made when it comes to the participation of women in the energy sector?

Hon. Bill Walker: Thank you for the great question from the great member from Thornhill. Much like our province's energy supply, we need Ontario's energy workforce to be diverse. Our government knows that having more women in energy contributes to diverse thinking within organizations in the energy sector.

Minister Rickford and I are pleased with the work being done by industry associations such as Women in Nuclear Canada, which works to promote career interest in nuclear engineering, science, technology, the trades and other nuclear-related professions, particularly when it comes to women and youth. They're truly helping to lead the way. A huge shout-out to Lisa McBride for her great work as president of this great organization.

I know that Minister Rickford had the opportunity to speak with Women in Nuclear Canada at the Canadian Nuclear Association conference last week, to recognize the important work that they are doing to encourage more women to enter the energy sector.

We look forward to continuing to advance initiatives and organizations such as Women in Nuclear, to ensure that an increasing number of women choose the energy sector as a career path.

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

Mrs. Gila Martow: I just want to remind the House that I graduated from the School of Optometry at the

University of Waterloo in the 1980s, when 75% of the class was male. Fast-forward a few decades, and we're now seeing the complete reverse, where 75% are female in this STEM profession.

So, with International Women's Day coming up this Sunday, the associate minister's update is certainly welcome news. It's great to hear about the work being done by the organization Women in Nuclear to break down the barriers for women entering the energy sector's workforce.

Maybe the associate minister could tell us a little bit more about other initiatives in the industry to promote careers in the skilled trades, science, technology, engineering and mathematics for women in energy.

Hon. Bill Walker: Thank you to the member from Thornhill for being such a great role model for women across our great province.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a very happy International Women's Day this coming Sunday. We are fortunate in our province to have such incredible role models for young girls and women hoping to one day chart their own career path, particularly in the energy sector, and all of the great women here in this House, on both sides of the aisle, who inspire young girls and women every single day.

Later today, I will be speaking at the Ontario Energy Association's Women in Energy 2020 forum. The title of this forum is A New Decade. This will certainly ring true to many in the industry, an industry that, for the past number of years, has thankfully experienced an increase in the number of women in the sector's talent pool, helping to reshape Ontario's and Canada's energy industry for the better.

Mr. Speaker, with the support of industry organizations, I'm optimistic for what the future of the energy sector has in store for our women across this great province.

FLOODING

Mr. Chris Glover: My question is for the Premier. The Great Lakes are near or at record high levels this year. Lake Ontario is currently 19 inches over the long-term average for February. In New York state, the Army Corps of Engineers is putting up sandbags and water barriers and building water diversions. In Manitoba, they've announced \$3 million in funding for municipalities. But in Ontario, this Premier has only written a letter to the Prime Minister.

The risk of flooding is high this spring, and if it's a wet spring, the flooding will be worse than in 2017 and 2019. Homeowners along the Toronto waterfront and all of the Great Lakes waterfronts are deeply concerned about the risk of flooding. Why isn't your government taking real action?

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

Hon. John Yakubuski: Thank you to the member for the question.

As you know, the devastating flooding across the province prompted the Premier and myself to get active very quickly last year. We appointed a special adviser for flooding. He submitted a report in the fall of last year, and we've been seized with that report.

Multiple ministries of our government have been involved in planning and devising a flood strategy. That will be released very shortly, in the coming days.

I can assure you that we are working with the federal government, municipal governments, all partners, recognizing the challenges that high water can bring to all of us and the role that nature and man play.

We are seized on our responsibility, continuing to do everything that we can to protect people and property in this province.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: Due to concerns around elevated water levels, councillors in Chatham-Kent called a state of emergency for the second time in seven months, and they voted unanimously to close parts of Erie Shore Drive, asking residents to stay away from their homes for up to eight weeks.

In New York, homeowners affected by Great Lakes flooding could apply for up to \$50,000 of state funding, but in Ontario, there was no relief from the provincial government in either 2017 or 2019.

The 2017 floods cost the city of Toronto \$8 million in damages, and all indications show that this flood could be worse.

Instead of investing in flood protection, your provincial government has cut 50% of the conservation authorities' budget for flood management.

The York Quay and island neighbourhood associations held a forum yesterday, and I heard from many constituents who are worried about the impact of flooding.

Will your government restore funding for the conservation authorities, and will you provide funding or make funding available for homeowners to help them recover from what could be another year of disastrous floods?

Hon. John Yakubuski: Thank you again for the question.

I want to make it very clear that we made it clear to conservation authorities last year that they must focus on their core responsibilities of flood forecasting and flood management, as partners of ours here in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

I also want to point out that our disaster relief assistance for Ontarians, DRAO, through my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, has been actively involved. When people have a claim and they have been affected by flooding, we have a program in place to assist Ontarians for the flood damages.

While I can't comment on what's being offered in other jurisdictions, I can say that the devil is always in the details. It's one thing to read a press release and hear something in the papers, but you need to find out and drill down to what is actually happening in those jurisdictions.

I want to assure people in Ontario again that we have been seized with and focused on the challenges of flooding in this province since last year's events and the receiving of Doug McNeil's report. We are focused and working with our partners to ensure that we do what we can. We cannot control Mother Nature, and people do understand that, but we are—

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

ABATTOIRS

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My question, once again, is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, our government has demonstrated, time and time again, that we are committed to helping Ontario's agri-food industry, and this includes our great beef industry.

Recently, the minister announced that our government will be providing the beef sector with further support for provincially licensed abattoirs. Would the minister please tell us more about this announcement?

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: I want to thank the member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington for the question.

Recently, our government announced support for Ontario's beef sector to grow and develop new markets by investing up to \$2 million in cost-share funding that enhances operations at provincially licensed abattoirs. This also involves investments of up to \$292,600, under the Places to Grow initiative, to help Beef Farmers of Ontario with marketing efforts to access emerging markets in Vietnam, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines and the European Union.

Mr. Speaker, our government is open for business, and that means support for our beef sector to help them feed the world.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you again, Minister, for that excellent response.

I'm greatly encouraged by our government's support for the beef industry. These sorts of investments will allow Ontario's beef industry to access new markets and provide them with further support in ensuring that Ontario has some of the best and safest food in the world.

Would the minister please tell us more about what this support will do for Ontario's beef industry?

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: Thanks again for the supplementary question. Food safety has always been the priority of this government. To ensure that Ontarians continue to have some of the best and safest food in the world, it is necessary that we continue to support the industry. By providing this support, our government will strengthen and grow provincially licensed abattoirs, helping to secure future economic growth opportunities for Ontario's beef farmers. Looking to diversify and to build new markets is an important step to ensure the success of this industry.

I would just like to add that Bill 156 will help all these farmers do what they need to do best, which is to protect

their people, protect their animals and protect the safety of our food. I hope we all, right after this question period, stand up and vote in favour of Bill 156.

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

DEFERRED VOTES

SECURITY FROM TRESPASS AND PROTECTING FOOD SAFETY ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 SUR LA PROTECTION CONTRE L'ENTRÉE SANS AUTORISATION ET SUR LA PROTECTION DE LA SALUBRITÉ DES ALIMENTS

Deferred vote on the motion that the question now be put on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 156, An Act to protect Ontario's farms and farm animals from trespassers and other forms of interference and to prevent contamination of Ontario's food supply /
Projet de loi 156, Loi visant à protéger les fermes et les animaux d'élevage en Ontario contre les entrées sans autorisation et d'autres actes susceptibles de les déranger et à prévenir la contamination de l'approvisionnement alimentaire en Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have a deferred vote on a motion for closure on the motion for second reading of Bill 156, An Act to protect Ontario's farms and farm animals from trespassers and other forms of interference and to prevent contamination of Ontario's food supply.

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

The division bells rang from 1141 to 1146.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll ask the members to please take their seats.

On December 10, 2019, Mr. Hardeman moved second reading of Bill 156, An Act to protect Ontario's farms and farm animals from trespassers and other forms of interference and to prevent contamination of Ontario's food supply. Mr. Clark has moved that the question now be put.

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

Ayes

Anand, Deepak	Ghamari, Goldie	Park, Lindsey
Baber, Roman	Gill, Parm	Parsa, Michael
Babikian, Aris	Hardeman, Ernie	Pettapiece, Randy
Bailey, Robert	Harris, Mike	Piccini, David
Barrett, Toby	Hogarth, Christine	Rasheed, Kaleed
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Jones, Sylvia	Roberts, Jeremy
Bouma, Will	Kanapathi, Logan	Romano, Ross
Calandra, Paul	Karahalios, Belinda C.	Sabawy, Sheref
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Ke, Vincent	Sandhu, Amarjot
Cho, Stan	Khanjin, Andrea	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Clark, Steve	Kusendova, Natalia	Scott, Laurie
Coe, Lorne	Lecce, Stephen	Skelly, Donna
Crawford, Stephen	Martin, Robin	Smith, Dave
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Martow, Gila	Surma, Kinga

Downey, Doug
Dunlop, Jill
Elliott, Christine
Fedeli, Victor
Fee, Amy
Ford, Doug
Fullerton, Merrilee

McDonell, Jim
McNaughton, Monte
Miller, Norman
Mulroney, Caroline
Nicholls, Rick
Oosterhoff, Sam
Pang, Billy

Tangri, Nina
Thanigasalam, Vijay
Thompson, Lisa M.
Tibollo, Michael A.
Wai, Daisy
Yakubuski, John
Yurek, Jeff

Clark, Steve
Coe, Lorne
Crawford, Stephen
Cuzzetto, Rudy
Downey, Doug
Dunlop, Jill
Elliott, Christine
Fedeli, Victor
Fee, Amy
Fife, Catherine
Ford, Doug
Fraser, John
Fullerton, Merrilee
Gates, Wayne
Ghamari, Goldie

Mamakwa, Sol
Martin, Robin
Martow, Gila
McDonell, Jim
McNaughton, Monte
Miller, Norman
Miller, Paul
Monteith-Farrell, Judith
Morrison, Suze
Mulroney, Caroline
Natyshak, Taras
Nicholls, Rick
Oosterhoff, Sam
Pang, Billy
Park, Lindsey

Surma, Kinga
Tabuns, Peter
Tangri, Nina
Taylor, Monique
Thanigasalam, Vijay
Thompson, Lisa M.
Tibollo, Michael A.
Vanthof, John
Wai, Daisy
West, Jamie
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Yakubuski, John
Yurek, Jeff

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

Nays

Andrew, Jill
Armstrong, Teresa J.
Arthur, Ian
Begum, Doly
Bell, Jessica
Berns-McGown, Rima
Bisson, Gilles
Bourgouin, Guy
Burch, Jeff
Fife, Catherine
Fraser, John
Gates, Wayne
Glover, Chris

Gretzky, Lisa
Harden, Joel
Hassan, Faisal
Hatfield, Percy
Hillier, Randy
Horwath, Andrea
Kernaghan, Terence
Mamakwa, Sol
Miller, Paul
Monteith-Farrell, Judith
Morrison, Suze
Natyshak, Taras
Rakocevic, Tom

Sattler, Peggy
Shaw, Sandy
Singh, Gurratan
Singh, Sara
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Stiles, Marit
Tabuns, Peter
Taylor, Monique
Vanthof, John
West, Jamie
Wynne, Kathleen O.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 63; the nays are 37.

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

Mr. Hardeman has moved second reading of Bill 156, An Act to protect Ontario's farms and farm animals from trespassers and other forms of interference and to prevent contamination of Ontario's food supply. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some noes.

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

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1150 to 1151.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Anand, Deepak
Andrew, Jill
Armstrong, Teresa J.
Arthur, Ian
Baber, Roman
Babikian, Aris
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Begum, Doly
Bell, Jessica
Berns-McGown, Rima
Bethlenfalvy, Peter
Bisson, Gilles
Bouma, Will
Bourgouin, Guy
Burch, Jeff
Calandra, Paul
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon
Cho, Stan

Gill, Parm
Glover, Chris
Gretzky, Lisa
Hardeman, Ernie
Harden, Joel
Harris, Mike
Hassan, Faisal
Hatfield, Percy
Hillier, Randy
Hogarth, Christine
Horwath, Andrea
Jones, Sylvia
Kanapathi, Logan
Karahalios, Belinda C.
Ke, Vincent
Kernaghan, Terence
Khanjin, Andrea
Kusendova, Natalia
Lecce, Stephen

Parsa, Michael
Pettapiece, Randy
Piccini, David
Rakocevic, Tom
Rasheed, Kaleed
Roberts, Jeremy
Romano, Ross
Sabawy, Sheref
Sandhu, Amarjot
Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Sattler, Peggy
Scott, Laurie
Shaw, Sandy
Singh, Gurratan
Singh, Sara
Skelly, Donna
Smith, Dave
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Stiles, Marit

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

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 100; the nays are 0.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

I look to the minister: Which committee?

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: Justice.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

There being no further business this morning, this House stands in recess until 3 o'clock.

The House recessed from 1155 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: I would like to introduce my good friend Sunny Gill, president of the International Film Festival of South Asia, the largest film festival in North America. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'd like to welcome a number of members from Big Brothers and Big Sisters to Queen's Park today, with a special shout-out to Mike Treadgold, the executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Guelph. Welcome to Queen's Park.

MOTIONS

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

Hon. Paul Calandra: I am seeking unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding the adjournment proceedings scheduled for March 4, 2020.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice regarding the adjournment proceedings scheduled for March 4, 2020. Agreed?

Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that the adjournment debate scheduled for Wednesday, March 4, 2020, filed by the member for Kiiwetinoong be answered by the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines or his parliamentary assistant.

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

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm seeking unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding adjournment proceedings scheduled for Wednesday, March 4, 2020.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Calandra is seeking unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice regarding the adjournment proceedings scheduled for March 4, 2020. Agreed? Agreed.

Once again, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that the adjournment debate scheduled for Wednesday, March 4, 2020, filed by the member for Niagara Falls be answered by the Minister of Health or her parliamentary assistant.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Calandra has moved that the adjournment debate scheduled for Wednesday, March 4, 2020, filed by the member for Niagara Falls be answered by the Minister of Health or her parliamentary assistant.

The member for Timmins.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to prolong the debate. We're agreeing to this because of circumstance, but I'm certainly hoping that the government does not make this a habit when a question is asked to the minister and the minister, he or she, is not available. I'm hoping that we're going to be in the practice here of either having the minister or the parliamentary assistant to answer the questions.

We've agreed to the UC on this one on both counts because of circumstance, but I'm sure that my colleague the government House leader will agree with me that in the future, we'll try not to make this a habit.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Any further comments? Okay.

Mr. Calandra has moved that the adjournment debate scheduled for Wednesday, March 4, 2020, filed by the member for Niagara Falls be answered by the Minister of Health or her parliamentary assistant.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. Paul Calandra: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice for the arrangement of proceedings for debate on concurrence in supply.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent of the House

to move a motion without notice regarding concurrence in supply. Agreed? Agreed.

Again, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that, notwithstanding any standing order, the order for concurrence in supply for the various ministries and offices as represented by government orders 27 through 33, inclusive, shall be called concurrently; and

That when such orders are called, they shall be considered concurrently in a single debate; and

That two hours shall be allotted to the debate, divided equally among the recognized parties, at the end of which time the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of the order for concurrence in supply for each of the ministries referred to above; and

That any required divisions in the orders for concurrence in supply shall be deferred to deferred votes, such votes to be taken in succession, with one five-minute bell.

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

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

PALLIATIVE CARE

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a petition entitled "Support the Nancy Rose Act—Paediatric Hospice Palliative Care" strategy.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas for children with serious or life-limiting illness, a palliative approach to care can increase quality of life and decrease their pain and suffering;

"Whereas there is currently no comprehensive, coordinated and funded provincial strategy to address pediatric palliative and hospice care;

"Whereas the Nancy Rose Act would require the province to develop a strategy with the goal of increasing access to pediatric palliative and hospice care across Ontario;

"Whereas the strategy contained in the Nancy Rose Act would include targeted supports for families of children receiving palliative care, including mental health supports and respite;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass the Nancy Rose Act and call for all-party support."

I fully endorse this petition, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to affix my name to it and pass it to Juliana to take to the table.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: I have a petition entitled "Food Day Ontario Act."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the agri-food industry employs over 2.3 million Canadians and one in eight jobs in the Canadian economy; and

“Whereas the agri-food industry contributes over \$47.7 billion in GDP annually to Ontario’s economy; and

“Whereas Canada’s rich culinary culture is worthy of celebration; and

“Whereas fresh, nutritious, locally grown food is necessary for daily life and for proper health and wellness; and

“Whereas locally grown food is an essential component of Ontario’s agriculture sector; and

“Whereas the Food Day Ontario Act would encourage restaurants and consumers to purchase locally produced ingredients and to support our local suppliers; and

“Whereas Food Day Ontario will unite our communities, create jobs, and boost our economy; and

“Whereas the day will promote culinary sovereignty by emphasizing local food, local producers and local businesses; and

“Whereas an annual Food Day Ontario will recognize the hard work and dedication Ontario’s agriculture sector workers put in to providing nutritious and healthy food for so many communities;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario pass Bill 163, Food Day Ontario (Food Day Canada in Ontario) Act, 2019.”

I affix my name to this petition and hand it to page Nyle.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I have a petition from the Family Council Network 4 Advocacy.

“Time to Care Act—Bill 13.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas quality care for the 78,000 residents of (LTC) homes is a priority for many Ontario families; and

“Whereas the provincial government does not provide adequate funding to ensure care and staffing levels in LTC homes to keep pace with residents’ increasing needs and the growing number of residents with complex behaviours; and

“Whereas several Ontario coroner’s inquests into LTC homes deaths have recommended an increase in direct hands-on care for residents and staffing levels and the most reputable studies on this topic recommends 4.1 hours of direct care per day;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the LTC Homes Act (2007) for a legislated minimum care standard to provide an average of four hours per resident per day, adjusted for acuity level and case mix.”

I fully support this petition, sign it and give it to page Giselle to deliver to the table.

1510

TEACHERS’ COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Billy Pang: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government remains focused on reaching agreements with education labour unions to provide parents with predictability, certainty, and peace of mind over the coming year; and

“Whereas the government demonstrated that it has been a constructive force at the bargaining table by reaching a voluntary agreement with the Canadian Union of Public Employees; and

“Whereas the government remains available 24/7 to negotiate deals in good faith with education labour partners that support the needs of students and keep them in a positive learning environment throughout the year; and

“Whereas labour partners have engaged in job action under each government for the past 30 years; and

“Whereas labour partners continue to escalate towards strike action despite the government continuing to make reasonable and expanded offers to education labour partners; and

“Whereas strike action caused by unions could mean school closures, disruption and uncertainty to students and parents;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario calls on the government to continue bargaining in good faith with its labour partners to reach deals that keep kids in class, where they belong.”

I will add my name to this petition and I will send it with page Michael.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: Petitions continue to come into my office.

“Support Ontario Families with Autism.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas every child with autism deserves access to sufficient treatment and support so that they can live to their fullest potential;

“Whereas the Ontario Autism Program was badly broken under the Liberals, and the changes introduced by the Conservatives have made it worse; ...

“Whereas Ontario needs a true investment in evidence-based autism services that meets the needs of autistic children and their families;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to invest in equitable, needs-based autism services for all children who need them.”

I couldn't agree with this more. I hope we get it done soon. I'm going to give it to page Jessica to bring to the Clerk.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Mike Harris: I have a petition entitled "Food Day Ontario Act."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the agri-food industry employs over 2.3 million Canadians and one in eight jobs in the Canadian economy; and

"Whereas the agri-food industry contributes over \$47.7 billion in GDP annually to Ontario's economy; and

"Whereas Canada's rich culinary culture is worthy of celebration; and

"Whereas fresh, nutritious, locally grown food is necessary for daily life and for proper health and wellness; and ...

"Whereas the Food Day Ontario Act would encourage restaurants and consumers to purchase locally produced ingredients and to support our local suppliers; and

"Whereas Food Day Ontario will unite our communities, create jobs, and boost our economy; and

"Whereas the day will promote culinary sovereignty by emphasizing local food, local producers and local businesses; and

"Whereas an annual Food Day Ontario will recognize the hard work and dedication Ontario's agriculture sector workers put into providing nutritious and healthy food for so many communities;

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

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario pass Bill 163, Food Day Ontario (Food Day Canada in Ontario) Act, 2019."

I fully support this petition and will give it to page Rachel to bring to the table.

WATER QUALITY

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm pleased to present a petition that was developed by students at Bloor Collegiate Institute as part of their civics project. I want to mention that because I'm very proud of them for taking action to follow up on their project. It reads as follows:

"Lead in Water Pipes

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the citizens who live in Ontario suffer from lead-filled water pipes. Consuming water contaminated with lead can be dangerous to health;

"Whereas students in schools drink from fountains containing amounts of lead that exceed the national lead guideline;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Replace the lead and/or galvanized steel pipes which were placed before the 1980s with CPVC pipes, which will prevent corrosion of the pipes."

I'm pleased to sign this petition. I'm going to hand it to page Giselle to table with the Clerks.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Before I begin, I just want to congratulate the Honourable Minister Clark on his 10-year MPP anniversary. Woohoo!

This petition is entitled "Get Transit Projects Done Petition."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas many Ontarians are looking to their government to demonstrate a real commitment to delivering transit faster for the people in the greater Toronto area, reducing congestion, and connecting people to places and jobs; and

"Whereas everyone can recognize that there is an increasing demand for safe and reliable transportation options; and

"Whereas the city of Toronto has agreed to partner with Ontario to remain committed to removing roadblocks, engage local residents and businesses, as well as Indigenous communities; and

"Whereas Ontario deserves public transit that is more attractive, safe, affordable, and low-stress;

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

"Help deliver Ontario's four priority subway projects on time and on budget by proceeding as expediently as possible to pass Bill 171, Building Transit Faster Act, 2020, so that:

"(1) Hearings of necessity for expropriations of property along the transit corridors if the expropriations are for the purpose of the transit are eliminated;

"(2) A mechanism is created by which utility companies may be required to remove utility infrastructure, if necessary for the transit;

"(3) Municipal service and right of way access may be required to be provided for the transit, with the process being based around negotiation, with the possibility for an order if negotiation fails."

I affix my signature and I will proudly give it to page Nyle.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition here, signed by the great folks of Markham, that was sent to my office. It is from the ODSP Action Coalition.

"Petition on Proposed Changes to Social Assistance from ODSP Action Coalition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas on November 22, 2018, Minister MacLeod announced proposed reforms to Ontario's social assistance programs, including changing the ODSP definition of 'disability' to align 'more closely with federal government guidelines';

"Whereas federal definitions of disability as outlined in the Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPPD) and the

disability tax credit (DTC), have a much narrower definition of disability than the current ODSP definition, with more than five in 10 first-time CPP disability applicants being denied;

“Whereas aligning the ODSP definition with federal guidelines will mean that many more Ontarians with episodic or periodic disabilities, such as certain cancer treatments or mental illnesses, will be denied crucial supports and forced onto Ontario Works, which provides a maximum of only \$733 per month;

“Whereas Minister MacLeod also proposed on November 22, 2018, to increase the clawback rates on earned income in ODSP and OW from 50% to 75%, once exemption thresholds are met;

“Whereas the proposed increase to clawback rates from 50% to 75%, once income exemption thresholds have been met, will only serve to discourage recipients from seeking earnings beyond the exemption threshold, irrespective of the threshold amount;

“Whereas a \$14 minimum wage job with a 75% clawback on earnings effectively translates to working for \$3.50 per hour, which is hardly an incentive and grossly undervalues the labour of recipients;

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

“Keep the current definition of disability in ODSP. Keep the clawback rates for ODSP and OW at 50% maximum once income thresholds have been met, irrespective of the threshold amount.”

I couldn't agree with this more, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to affix my name to it and give it to page Michael to bring to the Clerk.

1520

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. David Piccini: I'm pleased to table a petition today with the subject line “Get Transit Projects Done Petition.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas many Ontarians are looking to their government to demonstrate a real commitment to delivering transit faster for the people in the” GTA, “reducing congestion, and connecting people to places and jobs; and

“Whereas everyone can recognize that there is an increasing demand for safe and reliable transportation options; and

“Whereas the city of Toronto has agreed to partner with Ontario to remain committed to removing roadblocks, engage local residents and businesses, as well as Indigenous communities; and

“Whereas Ontario deserves public transit that is more attractive, safe, affordable, and low-stress;

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

“Help deliver Ontario's four priority subway projects on time and on budget by proceeding as expeditiously as possible to pass Bill 171, Building Transit Faster Act, 2020, so that:

“(1) Hearings of necessity for expropriations of property along the transit corridors if the expropriations are for the purpose of the transit are eliminated;

“(2) A mechanism is created by which utility companies may be required to remove utility infrastructure, if necessary for the transit;

“(3) Municipal service and right of way access may be required to be provided for the transit, with the process being based around negotiation, with the possibility for an order if negotiation fails.”

Transit is much needed in this province, so I'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition and hand it to page Finnegan.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

CONCURRENCE IN SUPPLY

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I move concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, including supplementaries; the Ministry of Education, including supplementaries; the Ministry of Transportation; the Ministry of Infrastructure; the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, including supplementaries; the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks; and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, including supplementaries.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The President of the Treasury Board has moved government orders 27 through 33 inclusive. I look to the government side to lead off the debate and again recognize the President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Today, I am pleased to move the concurrence of the estimates. This is an important part of the fiscal cycle and a testament to our government's plan to restore our province's fiscal situation to sustainability. I urge all members to support concurrence in the estimates, so that spending on the programs and services that matter most to Ontario can be approved.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I would like to start by saying that I find finance and Treasury Board fascinating—and I'm sure the Treasury Board president does too, although that was a very short speech for something that I thought we would hear more about from the President of the Treasury Board.

The reason I think this is so important, even though most people don't understand it, is that this is one of the most fundamental responsibilities that we have as legislators. We are the keepers of the purse. It is our job as legislators—not the government's—to be the keepers of the treasury, and that's where the Treasury Board comes from.

This responsibility goes back to the Magna Carta. The pedigree of legislators having the ability to understand how money is being spent, or how money is not being spent, is something that has been passed on to us for

hundreds and hundreds of years. I've said it before: We can thank King John for misbehaving and spending the money of the Treasury Board; and then they had the Barons' War, and now we have the Magna Carta.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I would like you to tell that all over again.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I love that story.

So here we are, exercising our responsibility as legislators that has been passed down to us through the parliamentary system that we're here representing.

We are here today to look at the concurrence of estimates. We're going to hear a little bit later about the procedure by which we've gotten here. We're going to hear from the MPP for Davenport, who sat on the estimates committee, which is a step in helping legislators understand exactly how this money is being spent by the government. I take it very seriously that we need to look into this.

It's my sense, as the finance critic and as a relatively new legislator, that it is actually very difficult for us to understand fundamental components of the budget and how this money is being spent, and we have very few opportunities, very few tools. We can ask questions in question period. We can do our work on the estimates committee—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Public accounts.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Public accounts. We can ask questions that we put on the order paper.

One of the things that I learned recently is that while the budget is presented, there are a lot of things that can happen during the course of the year. Through Treasury Board orders, money can get moved from one budget line to another. Really, as legislators, and despite asking for that information—I wrote a letter to Treasury Board, and I also submitted an order paper question trying to understand how money is being moved around from ministry to ministry, particularly in light of some of the statements we heard in the House about the funding and the spending under the autism file, because it was really quite unclear as to what was going on—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Or what they didn't spend.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: —or what they didn't spend, although we do have the answer now about what they didn't spend.

I find it really concerning, for example, that we as legislators don't get the answers to how that money gets moved around until they get published in something called the Ontario Gazette. That happens way, way after the budget and the money is spent and gone.

I'm exercising my responsibility here, because I think it's important, but we're labouring under a difficulty to get access to good, clear information.

I would like to start by saying that what has been made clear through the estimates, through the access to the information that we have been able to glean, is that despite what the ministers across the way or the government may say about what they're doing, whether they stand up in the House and talk about walking back cuts—it has been made abundantly clear that they have not been walking back

cuts. The numbers in the estimates don't lie. They show exactly what spending has happened and what spending has not happened. I think it's important that that story gets out, because it's not just about the numbers and the money; it speaks to the priorities of this government, and it speaks to what the people of the province of Ontario are being told about the numbers.

It's my sense, when my constituents in Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas speak to me, that they don't have, at this point, any confidence in the numbers that the government presents. In some ways, they have tuned out the numbers, because we had a deficit that was \$15 billion, and then it was changed to \$9 billion and then \$7 billion. That kind of changing in significant numbers has led to a lack of confidence, and the people of Ontario being able to say that they feel confident that this government is competently representing the numbers. But what the people of Ontario actually do know is what their lives are like. That's how they understand the story.

In my constituency office and in all of our constituency offices on this side of the House, we hear time and time again from people calling about the struggles they're facing in their daily lives because of the cuts that they face with this government. We have heard again and again about cuts to education, and families struggling to make sure that their kids access courses so they can graduate. We have heard time and time again about people who can't find homes that they can afford.

We have heard time and time again about people who are struggling to access justice. The cuts that we have seen to legal aid have fundamentally limited people's access to justice. That is something that shouldn't be a budgetary concern. That is beyond just trying to cut a budget.

I had the pleasure, before I came in here, of talking to a gentleman by the name of Adam Smith. We ended up talking, of course, about Adam Smith. My parents are from Glasgow, so it was very important that we talked about that. He and I had a conversation where we actually felt that this idea of austerity budgets did not come from Adam Smith. In fact, his work has been misrepresented. The bulk of his work was not about austerity budgets, but the bulk of his work was about understanding that economists, people who are in charge of budgets—governments—had a fundamental responsibility, had a moral obligation to make sure the people in society had a basic standard of living.

1530

So I would like to say, in the spirit of talking about the Magna Carta and Adam Smith, that we understand that while the government may have one point of view, and while we do understand that we need to put our fiscal house in order, doing it on the backs of people who are already struggling has no justification in our minds, and certainly wouldn't speak to the kind of philosophy that Adam Smith put forward to those many years ago.

We're going to look at what the government is spending their money on. It's really important to say that we have heard how much this government is spending fighting the midwives in court, for example. They're spending all

kinds of money to challenge the climate in court. They seem to have no hesitation to rip up contracts that cost us hundreds of millions of dollars. That's a list of the things that they're spending on.

I always say to my constituents, "Don't kid yourself. This government is spending big. They're just not spending on the things that matter to you, that make your lives or your children's lives better."

One of the things that became abundantly clear very recently is that this government is spending a lot of money on tax breaks. Thanks to the Financial Accountability Officer, we had a recent report that showed that what this government is actually doing is ensuring that there are significant tax breaks. In fact, it needs to be said that spending on tax breaks is actually growing faster than any other spending that this government is undertaking. Tax measures are growing faster than spending on services. When I say "services," we're talking about your health care, your education, the safety of your roads. That's what we're talking about.

Who is most benefiting from these tax breaks that are a significant expenditure of this government? Well, the report shows us that the top 20% of income earners in the province of Ontario are getting 75% of the deductions, and that's adding up to over \$7 billion every year. That's a significant chunk. That's a significant expenditure that is not benefiting everyday Ontarians. That's certainly something that, I think, this government needs to understand—people are struggling; people who are not in the top 20% are struggling. They are having difficulty affording daycare, as we have heard. They have difficulty paying their increasingly growing hydro bill. And so, I think this is something of a balance—the idea that this government needs to understand that their decisions, the cuts that they put in here in this place, the costs and the cuts to services are having significant and potentially long-lasting impacts on the well-being of the people of Ontario. That's what this government is spending their money on.

As timely as it is, the Financial Accountability Office released another report this morning that helps us to understand. It's a tool that helps us to understand what is happening with the taxpayer dollars in the province of Ontario. The Financial Accountability Office issued their Expenditure Monitor for Q3. This is the analysis of the estimates for this government. It looks at the difference between what this government is saying they're spending their money on, or what the government had actually put in the budget, and what is actually happening.

I think that people would maybe find a disconnect between what the messaging has been about what this government is doing and what the numbers actually show. For example, actual versus planned spending at the end of Q3 in health care is down by \$400 million. I mean, health care—we talk about hallway medicine. We talk about this all the time in this House. We hear horrible stories about our loved ones, families, in hallways, and so it's hard to understand why a government would be underspending their budget on the thing that is most critical and most important to the people of Ontario.

I would also say that it's important to know that in every sector of the government—almost every sector—they're spending less than they have budgeted. It's hard to understand the reason for that when we know, in fact, we don't need more cuts, that the money has been allocated, and the government is sitting back and not the spending the money while everyday Ontarians are saying, "We need help in our health care, we need help with home care," and yet, what we see here is a budget that is underspending.

I think it's really important to know that in children's and social services, it really is disturbing to see that supports to individuals and families—by that, we mean residential services; autism; children, youth and community services—was \$336 million, or 10%, below planned spending. How is this possible? How is this government underspending on a file that is so, so poignant for all of us?

Miss Monique Taylor: Wait-list.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: We have the wait-list here in Ontario that continues to grow, and every day that this government delays acknowledging the pleas of autism families, every day that they do this, that wait-list only continues to grow.

Not only that, if you look at an individual child, who now has limited or no access to the services that improve their lives, they're losing valuable time. If they're not improving—certainly, we hear stories about children who are regressing because of this delay. I can't understand for the life of me why this government would be underspending on such a poignant file, such an important file.

This has been problematic. This is one of the reasons I thought that we needed to understand the Treasury Board orders, because one minute we hear it's \$600 million, and then it's \$300 million. One minute we hear the program is coming; the next minute we hear it's delayed. So, really, if there ever was something that this government could endeavour to get right, this would be the file.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: They're fast and loose with the numbers.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Fast and loose with the numbers.

Honestly, the thing is, all of the platitudes in the world are not going to help these families. I implore this government to look at what you are not spending money on, and if this government comes out and says, "Oh, our spending plan now will reduce the deficit faster," how exactly is this deficit getting reduced quicker? On the backs of who? I just told you who: on the backs of families who are waiting for services; on the backs of people who are in hallways, waiting for care.

We have members here—my legislative assistant—who have elderly women in their families who have fallen, and they've had to address falls for these elderly women. They're literally at home; they don't have the home care that they expected. So there is something that you should be spending your money on. You're not spending it. It's here; you're not spending it. My guess is you're just trying to save it for—what? It would be hard to know, because the government doesn't really give clear answers, but the numbers are giving very clear answers.

Interjection.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Well, there seems to be a lot of spending on the government side, so I imagine that my 95-year-old aunt should take up—

Interjections.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Really, it's very interesting to hear that the Minister of Heritage and Sport thinks this is a hilarious topic. She can laugh all she wants, but I'm talking about seniors, women, who have fallen and have absolutely no ability to access health care. I don't appreciate the snark and the heckling when we're talking about the health and well-being of our seniors, from the Minister of—

Interjection.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes, exactly. Methinks thou doth protest too much. We're going to do a little Shakespeare now; we're going to the 15th century.

Interjections.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Mr. Speaker, I know that you're interested in what I have to say. The government may not be, because they might actually even not understand the numbers themselves, so maybe they might want to listen. That would be more helpful.

1540

But what we heard this morning was talk about infrastructure spending, and what we have here from the FAO clearly indicates that this government is not investing in infrastructure. The numbers are here. They're not investing in health care infrastructure. That spending is way below what was projected, that capital spending.

They're certainly not investing in the infrastructure in education, at a time—and I'm sure the member from Davenport will highlight this—when our kids are going to school in crumbling schools, schools with lead, schools where there's no heat in the winter sometimes and there are sweltering classrooms. This government has the budget, but they seem to be underspending in this instance.

We do know that we have been left in this position—the Liberals left us in this position. I understand. They did not invest. We have crumbling schools, as I've described. I was part of the pre-budget consultation. I toured the province, and we heard at every city that we were in—we also heard at AMO from every municipality, who said to us that they are struggling with infrastructure costs, that they can't keep up. They have crumbling bridges, they have crumbling roads and they are asking this government to help them out.

But instead, what we see in these estimates, in this budget, is that rather than heed the call of municipalities, whether it's the city of Hamilton, whether it's the city of Mississauga, whether it's the city of Brampton—they all said, "We need help," but rather than help out, this government instead has chosen to download more costs onto the backs of municipalities. I actually heard more than one time that the municipalities—the mayor of Brampton, for example, described that if they have to break out these extra costs, they're going to call it the Ford tax on the property tax bill. They're telling you they need help, but you don't seem to be listening, and you're underspending your budget.

But I would have to say that this morning what we did hear was a very interesting answer from the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, when we had a question—a very important question—about the flooding that we have faced in Ontario and that we're likely to face again. I mean, we had historic flooding in parts of Ontario. We had people who lost their homes—literally; their homes were washed away. Municipalities do not have the ability to address these kinds of significant—they used to be called hundred-year storms, but they're happening with each season. They can't help. Municipalities are struggling to keep people safe and property safe.

Really, the question that we asked this morning, in the House was simply, "What is this government doing to help people, to help municipalities protect their property in light of these increased floodings?" We know that the Great Lakes are already at record or near-record levels. We know that climate change is only exacerbating this. We had people from insurance brokers all across the province saying that climate change is real and that the impacts of these floodings are costing millions, if not billions of dollars. And yet, in this House, we had the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, despite sitting on a government's budget estimates that say they're underspending on infrastructure, talk about a plan. They studied and they have a plan, but absolutely no dollar was committed.

The Ontario adviser that the minister talked about recommends the new flooding plan, but the province is not committing to funds. A plan is great. I guess if there's lots of paper in the plan, they could use it to sop up some of the flooding that's going to happen in our homes. But without a real plan that includes the resources and the funding that municipalities and people need to keep themselves safe, really, the plan is just that: It's just a plan.

This is at the same time that this government has no credible climate plan. They don't have any plan to help people mitigate against the impacts of flooding that's climate-related. In my riding, Spencer Creek, which is part of the headwaters, floods quite regularly. Again, lots of damages happen in the city of Dundas—absolutely no help from this government.

But what the government has done, what the minister did say, is that in fact they have cut the budget by 50% for conservation authorities across the province. What I would like to say is that conservation authorities are on the front lines. They are responsible for some of the best, most innovative green infrastructure that we need to help us combat and deal with this looming deluge that we have in terms of our property being flooded.

For example, in Hamilton, our conservation authority has created a very innovative, naturalized pond that is actually on top of the escarpment. This is a geography lesson: In Hamilton, we have an escarpment—the same thing that Niagara Falls flows over—and it flows down to the lower half of the city. They are creating a naturalized wetland to trap and collect that water to prevent flooding in the lower city. That's the kind of leadership that we

expect from this government, and we certainly expect this government to commit funds to protect people.

I'm not just talking about flooding and property, but I'm talking about protecting people so that front-line services are there for them, so that when they go to the hospital there's a bed available for them that's staffed with a nurse, and so that their elderly family members don't need to languish at home waiting for home care because PSWs won't be there because they're not paid properly.

It's really very important that we look at these estimates, because they tell the story of what is happening in the province. We don't have to listen to the government's spin on this. We can actually look at the numbers and know exactly what this government is choosing not to spend on and what they're choosing to spend on. It's a very different story than what people expect from the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise today, in my role as parliamentary assistant to the President of the Treasury Board for internal audits, to talk about estimates.

Before I begin, I want to note that I'll be sharing my time with my colleagues the member for Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill and the member for Willowdale.

I'll be highlighting some key points on how our government has been delivering on our core commitments outlined in the 2019 budget. This budget, introduced on April 11, 2019, outlined our priorities. It built on the five core commitments that we were elected on:

- restoring accountability and trust in the province's finances;
- ending the culture of waste and mismanagement in government;
- making Ontario open for business and open for jobs;
- cutting hospital wait times and ending hallway health care; and
- putting more money back in taxpayers' pockets, where it belongs.

Over the year, I've heard members of the opposition raise questions about why we're so focused on restoring the fiscal health of our province. The previous government and the previous finance minister were spending \$40 million a day more than they collected in revenue, every single day. Ontario's debt nearly tripled between 2003 and 2018. Our debt-to-GDP ratio grew from 27% to 40%, a number never seen before in Ontario's history. This was reckless and unsustainable. At nearly \$360 billion, we now have the world's largest subnational debt, larger than any other province, state or city in the world. The interest alone costs us over \$13 billion every year, or \$36 million every day, or \$1.5 million every hour. Without fiscal sustainability, we continue to pay billions of dollars in interest alone.

As former Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin said, "The debt and deficit are not inventions of ideology. They are facts of arithmetic. The quicksand of compound interest is real."

I want to repeat a point made by our President of the Treasury Board: Restoring the province's fiscal health is not just a fiscal issue; it's a moral one, as well. That is not just a tag line. It's about the kind of province we're building together. Without fiscal health in Ontario, more of our loved ones will be treated in hospital hallways, more of our schools will fall into disrepair, more of our public services will go unfunded, and our neighbourhoods will be less safe. When governments must focus on their lenders abroad instead of on the real needs at home, the most vulnerable among us always suffer the most. And of course, the real victims are our children, our grandchildren and our seniors, who will have to live with the consequences. This is unacceptable.

1550

Mr. Speaker, this is why we are so determined to transform government and ensure sustainability for generations to come. Because when we do, we get more than just financial sustainability. We get a province that works, now and for the future.

This is something we should all be able to get our heads around. Our government has already taken several steps to control unnecessary expenses and to ensure our tax dollars are treated with respect. This includes important initiatives like the creation of the Audit and Accountability Committee to direct internal audits into priority areas across the government. This committee, which I am proud to be a member of, is the only one of its kind in Canada, and it is already helping to bring a new level of accountability to ensure we receive the best value for our money.

We have also taken bold steps to end March madness spending, which happens too often at the end of the government's fiscal year. We have seen significant cost savings because of these measures. By implementing year-end budget management, spending controls and targeted measures to end March madness, the government saved \$153 million in the last fiscal year, and we built on our commitment to restore trust and accountability to the province's finances and to spend Ontario's money smarter.

Doing government differently means making a cultural shift, and that's the most difficult thing to do. We're making smarter decisions that will enable respect for taxpayers' dollars within the government itself.

We are taking steps to get smarter through enterprise risk management. This is the practice of identifying, assessing, prioritizing and managing the unknown in an organization. Enterprise risk management helps to forecast and manage risks by enhancing internal oversight, improving coordination between departments and ensuring a robust decision-making process across the entire organization. In other words, Mr. Speaker, this process helps organizations deploy limited resources to the greatest effect and, at the same time, identify problems before they can take root.

Enterprise risk management is recognized as a best practice in the private sector. In the 2019 budget, it was recognized as an important enabler in our government's efforts to ensure improved services and outcomes for Ontarians.

The need for effective enterprise risk management was reinforced by EY Canada in a 2018 line-by-line review. The review called for a commitment to evidence-based decision-making, including the consideration of business risks and the implementation of enterprise risk management across ministries and provincial agencies.

I'm pleased to report that last month, we announced the creation of the Office of the Comptroller General. This will be the first among Canada's provinces to be a deputy-minister-level position. The comptroller general will be responsible for working with ministries and provincial agencies to provide advice, share information on effective enterprise risk management and ensure risks are properly identified and managed before public money is spent, providing greater value and accountability for the people of Ontario. The comptroller general will lead risk management practices across the entire government, which will include the analysis of fiscal impacts and the overall viability of policy decisions.

The creation of the Office of the Comptroller General and the enterprise risk management office is just another example of our government's efforts to transform and modernize. I know we're going to continue to bring the rigour of business into the business of government.

Before I pass this over to my colleagues, let me conclude by saying I'm confident that our ambitious new approach will strengthen the government's ability to forecast and mitigate risk and improve our internal oversight of all decision-making. The steps we have taken are about putting the taxpayers at the centre of everything this government does. They are about putting structures in place that end the culture of waste and create a new culture of efficiency in our government.

Our approach is to help bring the deficit under control in a way that protects what matters most: our core services, including health care and education and all other programs the people of Ontario depend on.

But I would like to reiterate the fact that the previous government was spending \$40 million more than they collected in revenue every single day. As well, we have a \$360-billion debt in this province, and we spend \$13 billion every year—that's \$36 million a day, \$1.5 million an hour. We have to get this under control for our future generations.

ROYAL ASSENT
SANCTION ROYALE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to a certain bill in her office.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Short): The following is the title of the bill to which Her Honour did assent:

An Act to amend the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 / Loi modifiant la Loi de 2002 sur le courtage commercial et immobilier.

CONCURRENCE IN SUPPLY

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Marit Stiles: It is an honour to speak here on concurrence of the estimates of this government as the education critic for the official opposition and on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Davenport.

The estimates process is one of the foundational pillars of our legislative system, and the opposition has an incredibly important role to play in providing a check on the government's spending plans and also in holding them to account for the decisions they are making about the future of our public services. It is a responsibility that I, and I know my colleagues, take very, very seriously.

Few areas of provincial expenditures are as important to the future of our province as the public education system. Decisions about spending—or cutting—in education directly impact the lives of our most precious resource, our children. With that in mind, I'm going to be spending some time today reviewing what happened at estimates committee, what we learned, what we didn't, and then I'm going to talk a little bit about where we go from here. I should say I was happy to be present at all of the many, many hours of estimates committee where education was being discussed.

I'm going to review a little bit of what took place at those committee hearings, because the education estimates were reviewed at the committee on October 30, and November 5, 6 and 19, I believe. The official opposition was represented by myself, MPP Wayne Gates and MPP Dolly Begum.

I want to thank, first of all, the many ministry staff who were there for their hard work and participation in those meetings.

Let me take you back to what we knew at the time, because it has been a bit of a moving target, this government's education plans. At the time, we knew a few things about this government's plan for education. They were calling for class size averages to increase, starting as early as grade 4. In secondary schools, the class size average was set to go from 22 to 28, and indeed by the time we sat in the estimates committee, it had already increased for year one to about 22 in most boards, and the impact of that was being felt throughout the system, in a lot of chaos, cuts and confusion.

We know that that plan eventually would directly result in the loss of 10,000 teaching positions. That was something that was actually confirmed, and those numbers were the numbers from the Financial Accountability Office as we headed into estimates, and that elimination of those teaching positions would take place over four years with more, by the way, if you were to factor in the plan for secondary students to be shifted out of the classroom and into these online—and, in this case, times four—mandatory online learning courses.

The introduction of a new fund to slow down the layoffs—I like to call it the “teacher elimination fund”—and a massive new expenditure in the form of a tax credit,

a rebate for child care, had a significant impact on the ministry budget. I've said many times in this House and I'll say it again: The Ministry of Education—and I can only speak to that part of the budget—is a shell game; it's a shell game. It looks like it has been inflated dramatically, but actually if you look carefully and you dig down a little bit under the surface, you realize that they're just throwing new things in there to inflate it.

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At the time we began reviewing the estimates, we were already seeing the results of those cuts, as I just mentioned. Students were finding that their course selections were dwindling as classes grew in the first phase of class-size increases. Students were contacting my office, and I know many of my colleagues were getting students in tears, not just parents—parents in tears too, but students in tears—from all over Ontario to tell us that the courses they needed to graduate or needed for their post-secondary preparations were no longer being offered at their schools. That hasn't changed so far.

Those included classes—and I've stood in this House and I did this at estimates committee: I went through many of the courses and listed them off for the Minister of Education, the courses that have been eliminated board by board. I have to say I was surprised, because I think that there is this assumption that the courses that will go first are art and music. I believe those are absolutely crucial in our education system. But I want to add it was art and music, and it was a lot of those courses that actually make kids want to stay in school and also lead to fantastic careers in a really important industry that the minister of culture and everything else is often talking about. But let me tell you, having worked in that industry, it's a major driver in our economy.

But these classes that were being reduced included courses in STEAM/STEM; it included courses in the trades, trade-related courses; it included things like construction technology—I'll never forget that one in Peel District School Board, because I thought, "Wow, of all the things that this government talks about, to cut those courses—it's mind-boggling."

Anyway, this reality that we were seeing, and that continues to this day, ran completely counter to the government's own claims that they were investing in the skilled trades and in other areas.

We also heard from education workers and teachers who were already losing their jobs as a result of these cuts. And throughout my questioning over those seven hours to the Minister of Education, I tried to bring the stories of real people to the forefront, because as I said, estimates are not just a financial instrument; they are the blueprint for the direction that a government is taking. We worked really hard to show the minister, his staff and the government members that the blueprint they put forward was failing our kids.

We also had some light shed on estimates thanks to the work of the independent Financial Accountability Office. I want to thank the Financial Accountability Office, actually, for the excellent work that they are doing, not just

in providing us with information, but doing it in a way that is easy to understand, it is easily digestible. I think this is very, very important for those folks who are watching to be able to see very clearly what's happening, and to peel away some of the layers around some of this stuff. As I mentioned, often this is a bit of a shell game, so it's important to shed some light on that.

In the FAO report where they looked at the Ministry of Education estimates, they highlighted a number of key issues. First, the core cost drivers of education spending are the school-age population, which is age four to 18, and the other core cost driver is price inflation. Over the last five years, education core cost drivers grew by a combined average of 2.2%, while Ministry of Education spending increased by an average of 3.3% per year. Over the next five years, ministry spending is projected to slow to 1.0% average annual growth. In contrast, education core cost drivers are projected to accelerate to 2.7% average annual growth.

What does this mean? The FAO made it clear that achieving the spending plan that's outlined in the 2019 budget was contingent on two things: increasing class sizes—as we mentioned, some of that involves also cutting the number of teachers that you need by having these really large, mandatory online courses—and also limiting public sector compensation through their—some would argue; we would argue—unconstitutional Bill 124.

I want to give credit right now to the coalition of workers and labour unions who are challenging this legislation in the courts, many of whom were here today with the Ontario Federation of Labour.

Speaker, despite the repeated claims of historic investments in education, the government's plan relies, to this day, on cuts to classrooms and cuts to jobs. Let me just be clear: You are not keeping up with inflation, not even one little bit. In fact, it is actually a cut. It is a cut to education. You don't have to believe me; you can talk to the Financial Accountability Office. Despite increasing enrolment, per pupil funding is actually down. That's the truth of it, and that is the number that matters.

We see the impact of those cuts today in our classrooms. The FAO has measured the impact on class size changes on our schools and the numbers are stark. The FAO estimated that the move from 28 to 1, the class size ratio—which was the only thing on the books until yesterday, so we're going there—would result in the elimination of 994 elementary teachers by 2023-24 and 9,060 secondary teaching positions lost, for a total of over 10,000 fewer teachers, as I said earlier, in Ontario schools. And that's just the teachers.

Speaker, I can tell you right now that nobody voted for that. Nobody voted for that. As we know now, the government's own consultations on class sizes showed just how strongly Ontarians oppose that short-sighted scheme.

I want to go now into some of the things that we found out and some of the questions we specifically asked. That was the lay of the land when we were reviewing the education estimates. Those of us in the opposition worked really hard to get more information from the minister

about the fiscal impact of the government's education policies. Unfortunately, it was pretty darn hard to get clear answers on things like class size increases and firing of teachers and pushing kids into mandatory e-learning and how that was going to benefit our children. The minister used the excuse of bargaining confidentiality—my goodness, I should have gone through and counted it. It would be hard to keep count. In fact, the minister had legal counsel sitting right next to him the entire time to give him that out when we asked questions that Ontarians were actually sending to us. It was quite concerning.

I want to point out that one of the questions we asked was this: We asked the minister to provide the submissions, the consultation, the million-dollar consultation—biggest consultation ever, I think it was called—to us in the estimates committee, because it's cited so many times as the rationale for these cuts. So we wanted that. The minister said, "No, we can't. I'm sorry, we're beholden. We're in the middle of bargaining and that would impact bargaining." Well, no kidding, people. No kidding. We know why, and now we have the proof. It's sitting right here on my desk. On my computer are the 7,000 individual submissions this government received, which they refused to release, which they refused to even acknowledge—shameful, shameful behaviour by this government—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Bragging about a consultation.

Ms. Marit Stiles: —bragging about some consultation and then sitting on the results. Because guess what? It was going to undermine them at the bargaining table. And what were they bargaining? They were bargaining cuts to our classrooms. They were bargaining away our children's public education—shameful. You know, at least be truthful. At least be up front.

Interjection.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'll withdraw. I'll anticipate that one, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member on a point of order.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Very respectfully, Mr. Speaker, I think we are talking about the estimates over here. The member opposite is talking about the education stuff that is currently in—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please. I appreciate the comments from the member. I am listening carefully. There are a number of sections that we are discussing at this point in time, so I find that the member is in order. She's fine, and all is good.

I shall now return back to you, member from Davenport, to continue.

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Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you, Speaker. I hope I didn't lose too much time there because of that, but I appreciate you on that.

Interestingly enough, the commitment to confidentiality seems to have evaporated in the months since the minister has repeatedly taken to the media instead of the bargaining table. It happened again yesterday, when we

had yet another revision to their plan delivered in the media studio, at the podium, while education unions waited at the table to bargain a deal. But despite the minister's manoeuvring at committee, we were able to learn a few new things through the estimates review, and I want to go through those, because—actually, I'm a little bit of an estimates geek now, I think. I really enjoyed that, I have to say, in a kind of sick way. What I liked was that we actually did get some information from them which was useful, I think—useful in terms of being able to share it with the broader public so people can be informed and really know what's going on.

Here are a few of the things. On the subject of mandatory e-learning, which, again, was a radical shift that came out of nowhere, I pushed the minister to point to any jurisdiction where they had actually implemented a similar mandatory scheme. I had gone through all the literature. I'd found a few examples of jurisdictions in the United States where they had introduced one mandatory online learning course, but nothing beyond that. But it was useful. The minister was able to confirm that there were only four jurisdictions they were aware of in the world. I can't remember all the states, but I know Alabama, and members opposite would know that one too: Alabama, Michigan, Florida and one other. Obviously, we also then asked for more research and what they were basing this on, because I haven't been able to find any studies that said that mandatory, compulsory online learning was something that had any beneficial results other than cutting costs, which, obviously, is ultimately what I think this is about. But anyway, we asked about that. We got that information.

We asked about the Priorities and Partnerships Fund going down. We asked about EQAO funding going up, and why that was. We asked about the school repair backlog. I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, when we went in, the number we had for school repairs in this province—the capital repair backlog—was \$15.8 billion. I can tell you, as a former school board trustee, I was pretty focused on those numbers over the last bunch of years. We saw it go up immensely under the previous Liberal government. We saw that number balloon to \$15.8 billion. It's really unimaginable. It's hard to imagine what that looks like. I can tell you that it looks like roofs that are leaking, and—I used this example in estimates—they move the water tables around in the kindergarten rooms to catch the leaks from the ceilings. That's what that looks like. It looks like lead in our water, in our schools, like kids with coats in the classrooms in the winter, and sweltering in the summer months. That is what that looks like.

But I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that it was in estimates, when I just threw that out—I said, "Can we get an updated number? What's the latest?" I was not expecting what was muttered—quite quietly, I'll say, but to be fair, they came forward with it: \$16.3 billion. An increase: Can you imagine? It has gone from \$15.8 billion to \$16.3 billion. That's a \$400-million increase, I believe, under the term that this government was in power, a year and a half at the time—not even a year and a half. That was surprising, and

I think an indication that we're still not putting enough into capital repairs. That was disturbing.

Other things that we were not able to find out: We were not able to find out why courses were being cancelled. We were not able to find out why this government was making cuts to special education funding. We were not able to find out what class size was too large for this government. That was an interesting question because there is a debate about whether there should be caps on class sizes. This government doesn't want caps on class sizes. I asked the minister, repeatedly, "What is too big? Is it 30? Is it 40? Is it 50?" And I could not get a response, which I found quite disturbing, as did, I think, many parents who wrote to me later.

I also asked how firing 10,000 teachers and education workers was going to help our kids succeed. How is removing those professionals from our classes going to help our kids?

In many cases, as I said earlier, the minister hid behind concerns about confidentiality around the bargaining process, which, I have to say, given how this minister is conducting bargaining, boggles the mind. Apparently, bargaining in this round is being conducted behind a podium; it is not being conducted at a bargaining table. Having sat on both sides of bargaining tables, on the management side and on the union side, in national negotiations, I can tell you that is an unusual situation to be in. This minister, I think, is doing a disservice, frankly, to collective bargaining and to all of us in this province by not conducting this in a more professional manner. I raise it because it was something that was being used in estimates as a reason not to provide us with information we needed.

I also want to mention that we put several questions to the Ministry of Education, and we did have certain commitments by ministry staff to present that, to table those reports later on. Actually, it was interesting, because it wasn't until yesterday—I delivered a letter to the Minister of Education, and what do you know? Just before we came into the House, it arrived. So I'm going to have to go through it. It was amazing.

I'm not going to go through what all of the remaining questions were.

We did have a number of questions on child care funding.

We asked whether the minister could provide a list of current members of the two ministry-level advisory tables. No information had been provided.

The member from Niagara Falls asked a lot of questions about violence in our schools, which I really appreciated because it is definitely one of the number one issues and questions we get, with concerns from education workers and families.

We also asked the minister to give us a breakdown of how many staff he has in his office—and his associate minister and his parliamentary assistant. I was kind of surprised that they couldn't just say, "I have this many people working for me." But they didn't, which was odd. I'm looking forward to seeing if the minister was able to figure that out in the interim.

We also asked about things like advertising.

Mr. Speaker, it's no surprise that we can't support this agenda or these expenditure estimates. We can't support a government that cuts education—and I might add, at a time when they are willing to give people with incomes of over \$123,000 over 43% of their tax giveaways. We know, as the FAO reported earlier, that such an enormous chunk of that tax giveaway is being given to the very wealthiest people, while it is low-income people who struggle. It is low-income people who can't afford to put their kids, by the way, in private schools, which are advertising like crazy right now over class size ratios of 14 to 1. I wonder what that's about. This government can afford to give away so many tax giveaways to the wealthy that if it were counted as an expenditure, it would be second only to health care. It would exceed what they spend on our children's education.

Shame on this government. I can assure you that we will not be supporting this.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Parsa: It's always an honour to have the opportunity to rise in the House and contribute to the debate.

I want to thank my colleague Rudy Cuzzetto, the member for Mississauga–Lakeshore and my co-parliamentary assistant to the Treasury Board.

Speaker, I'm pleased to rise to speak about concurrence in the estimates, on behalf of the President of the Treasury Board, in my capacity as a parliamentary assistant. This afternoon, I'll be discussing what concurrence in the estimates is, and I'll be briefly touching on the estimates process itself.

While these legislation processes are not exactly the most exciting topics, it's important that all members and all Ontarians understand how the Legislative Assembly authorizes the spending of their money. After all, every dollar we spend comes from a hard-working taxpayer of this province, and we must always remember that.

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Speaker, I'd first like to provide a refresher on the government's fiscal cycle. As my colleague just mentioned, each fiscal year begins with a tabling of the budget, which lays out at the highest level what our government plans to do in the upcoming year.

After the 2019 budget was passed in this House, the government then tabled the expenditure estimates. The budget lays out the government's priorities, and the expenditure estimates set out details of the operating and capital spending needs of ministries and legislative offices for the fiscal year. They constitute the government's annual formal request of the Legislature to approve those spending requirements. Should they pass, the estimates give each ministry the legal authority to spend their operating and capital budgets.

The estimates must be introduced within the next 12 sessional days following the introduction of the budget. Once expenditure estimates are introduced, the Standing Committee on Estimates convenes. Chaired by a member

of the official opposition, the Standing Committee on Estimates selects between six and 12 members to appear before the committee from the ministries to answer questions on the specific topics of the expenditure estimates. The expenditure estimates of the ministries that are not selected are then considered passed by the committee and are reported back to the House.

Members of the committee vote on specific allocations within a selected ministry's expenditure estimates, providing valuable and important oversight to the government of the day. In accordance with the standing orders, the committee must complete its work by the third Thursday in November of each year.

When that process wraps up, the estimates are then brought back to this assembly for concurrence. Concurrence and the subsequent review of the supply bill represent the last step towards the Legislature's approval of the estimates for a fiscal year. Should the supply act pass, it signifies the final agreement of this House with the expenditure estimates proposed by the government.

I would like to highlight that, at this point, we're not proposing any new spending but simply looking to approve spending outlined in the estimates and approved by the committee. And so, this is where we find ourselves today: discussing concurrence for the estimates for the 2019-20 fiscal year.

For the 2019-20 fiscal year, the committee selected the Ministries of Health; Long-Term Care; Education; Transportation; Infrastructure; Children, Community and Social Services; the Environment, Conservation and Parks; and Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Following the order of concurrence in the estimates, we would introduce a supply act to give final statutory authority for spending by this government and this assembly. Today's discussion and vote are an important step on the way to approving government spending for the current fiscal year, which ends March 31.

To date, this government has shown that it will rise to the occasion and do the right thing for the people of Ontario when it's asked. It's with that mindset that we've been making decisions that put more money back in the pockets of Ontario taxpayers, where it belongs.

We're also ensuring that oversight on spending is strengthened to restore trust and accountability for our finances. We have made incredible progress so far, and we're just getting started.

It's also important to remember where we come from and how we got here. To fully understand concurrence, the supply bill, the numbers it contains and the context leading into the upcoming budget, we need to understand Ontario's current fiscal situation. The previous Liberal government left Ontario with a \$15-billion annual deficit in 2018-19, as projected by the Independent Financial Commission of Inquiry, and a net-debt-to-GDP ratio of 40.8%. We inherited the largest subnational debt of any jurisdiction in the world.

As a result of the reckless and poor decision-making by the previous government, Ontario owes \$1.4 billion in interest on its debt every hour. That's \$35 million every

day, Speaker. Let me repeat that statement for my colleagues in this House: As a province, we are paying \$35 million in interest payments alone every day. That's before a single dollar can be spent on the things that matter to the people of this province: our health care, our schools, our roads and our infrastructure. That's \$35 million we could be investing directly into improving lives across our province, and it's money that we could be using to build stronger education programs, better hospitals or updated infrastructure.

For us, spending smarter means recognizing that every dollar that the government spends is a dollar that was taken from a hard-working Ontario family. It means we need to maximize the value of that dollar, look at government expenditures in new and more critical ways, and find efficiencies that protect the long-term sustainability of our public services.

This is about rebuilding our province so Ontarians can flourish and reach their full potential. This is about building a future where, instead of struggling to find a job when they finish school, Ontario's bright young minds can put their creative talents to use and lead the world; a future where we enjoy the very best infrastructure and public transit, letting us get home to our families faster after work, instead of wasting hours on a hot subway train or standing in the cold waiting for a bus. When we do government differently, we get more than just financial sustainability; we get a province that works better for everyone.

Ontarians knew that there was a way for the government to spend their hard-earned tax dollars smarter. They knew that their government should be focused on outcomes and put the interests of the people first. That's why we took immediate action to restore trust and accountability in Ontario's public finances, and why we're making programs and services more effective and more efficient.

Speaker, our government is delivering on the core commitments we were elected on. We're making smarter decisions and changing the culture of government. As a result, Ontarians can expect improved services, better value for their money and a smarter government.

One thing we have learned from the people of this province is that they expect their government to be there for them when they need it, and then get out of their way when they don't. Between endless mountains of red tape and high taxes, our entrepreneurs and companies had been burdened by the previous government in a way that was unfair and unproductive for all Ontarians.

Speaker, government should be there to help people; it should be there to help businesses grow, prosper and create good jobs in our communities. That's why we promised to make Ontario open for business, and I'm proud to say that we're delivering on that promise in a big way.

When we took office, our province had one of the most overregulated business environments in the world, and that had real consequences for everyday Ontarians. We were not living up to our incredible potential, and investors were quickly losing confidence in Ontario's economy.

This government is doing things differently: scrutinizing, evaluating and re-evaluating spending decisions so we can provide the absolute best programs and services at the best possible value for money for Ontarians. That's why we need to pass these expenditure estimates, so we can get on with things and keep moving forward. We want to be productive for the people of Ontario and get back to work for them without delay.

Speaker, this government is implementing transformative and long-overdue measures to improve everything from our social services to our business environment. We're taking a holistic approach to addressing the challenges faced by Ontarians, and fostering co-operation and communication across every ministry and the entire government.

In 2018, we were elected on a promise to reduce red tape, lessen the burden on our businesses and create good jobs in every region of our province, and now I'm proud to say that we're living up to that commitment.

We've taken over 200 actions to eliminate red tape and stop overregulation. We've saved businesses about \$126 million annually by removing duplication. We've reduced fees, charges and levies by \$160 million, and we've just reduced regulatory costs by \$52 million through the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act, thanks to the incredible work of our small business and red tape reduction minister. Together, these changes will save Ontario businesses over \$338 million in compliance costs, and we're well on our way to meeting our June 2020 target of \$400 million.

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We are also making good on our promise to reduce the small business tax rate by 8.7%, saving over 275,000 small businesses across Ontario up to \$1,500 a year. Together with other tax measures, our government is expecting to deliver \$255 million in income tax relief for Ontario's small businesses in 2020.

As everyone in this House knows, Ontario's small businesses are the foundation of our economy, and they employ and serve millions of people across our province every day. The measures we have enacted will help our small businesses grow, serve their customers better, increase wages and create good jobs.

We're working tirelessly to improve government and reduce the burden on our job creators, and our plan is clearly working. Confidence is up, investment is returning to Ontario, and the future is looking brighter than ever.

Since June of last year, employment in our province has increased by over 307,000 jobs, and most of those are full-time, private sector jobs. In fact, in 2019, three quarters of all the jobs created in Canada were created right here in the province of Ontario. This is the kind of work that we are doing for the people of Ontario, and passing these expenditure estimates would allow us to continue with that work.

We know Ontarians expect that we will tackle the challenges that come along with good governance; that we will do the hard work it takes to fix what's broken, improve what isn't, and do it all while respecting every

dollar. They expect that we will focus on outcomes and put their needs first. This expectation means that we need to think about the experience Ontarians have with their government: their customer experience, if you will. We need to make sure that our interactions with Ontarians tangibly improve their lives.

Recently, the President of the Treasury Board announced that our government was undertaking a series of projects called smart initiatives that will help us build a better, more responsive government for Ontarians. This is another way the government is continuing to act on recommendations from the EY Canada line-by-line review and the Planning for Prosperity consultation: by implementing 22 smart initiatives that will transform how government operates to achieve key outcomes, provide services more efficiently, and ensure the sustainability of those services.

Building a smarter government is a critical part of our bold agenda to do government differently. Smart initiatives are about changing the culture of government, reducing waste, fixing inefficiencies and improving services for the people of Ontario. As part of this program, we studied all 191 government agencies to find ways to improve them.

We're providing business support to focus economic development on programs that demonstrate value for money.

We're making it easier for Ontarians to interact with the government and get the services they need through the Digital First initiative. This will provide more choice and more convenience to the people of this province and save them valuable time.

We're streamlining the way the government funds programs and services, allowing ministries and their partners to spend less time filling out forms and more time serving the people of Ontario.

We're centralizing the government's supply chain to leverage the government's buying power, drive efficiencies, support innovation and save Ontario taxpayers \$1 billion a year.

I'm pleased that we're making a real, positive difference for the 14-plus million people who call Ontario home.

We're building the foundation for a modern, fiscally sustainable system that truly puts the people at the centre of everything we do, both now and for future generations. That's why we introduced the Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act, 2019, which came into effect on November 8 of last year.

I want to be very clear: Our government values the important role that public sector workers play in delivering programs and services to the people of Ontario, and we think the world of our dedicated public servants. However, our situation meant that we needed to make decisions about how to progress forward. We have a moral imperative to ensure that our programs and services remain sustainable for Ontarians now and well into the future. Compensation represents roughly half of expenditures for provincial employees, totalling over \$72 billion a year.

Because of that, compensation plays a major role in how the province manages expenditures.

This is not about achieving a specific savings figure. We're taking these steps precisely so that we can protect our front-line jobs and workers and make Ontario fiscally sustainable now and for future generations.

There's still much work that needs to be done to bring Ontario back to fiscal health and to build a smarter, more efficient government. Again, to understand the full context of the concurrence, the supply bill and the context leading into this upcoming budget, we need to understand Ontario's current fiscal situation as well as our progress.

We're very proud of the responsible approach we're taking, spending smarter and treating Ontarians' money with respect. That's what the people of this province demand, and that's exactly what we're delivering for them.

I will now turn it over to my colleague the member for Willowdale and parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, who will speak about the progress we have been making at the Treasury Board Secretariat to rein in unnecessary spending and restore fiscal discipline across government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is, as always, an honour to rise in this place and speak on behalf of the people I represent in London West.

Speaker, I just wanted to start by providing some context for the motion we are debating today. We are debating whether there is concurrence with the estimates that were presented and reviewed by the estimates committee to support the Conservative government's budget last spring. It may seem a little bit odd that we're having this debate now, as we are entering a month in which we will soon see the 2020 budget, but that's the way things work here at Queen's Park.

Should the House concur with the estimates today—and I assume they will because this Conservative government has a majority, because we have a flawed, first-past-the-post electoral system in this province, which gives a party that has the majority of the seats, not the majority of votes, 100% of the power. However, given the outcome of today's vote, which we are pretty sure we know what it will be, the government will have the legal authority to finance the programs and, most of all, its tax cuts, which I will have more to say about later.

But when you reflect on the fact that we've only been back in this chamber 10 days since we adjourned in December, I think that most of us find ourselves in a place where it feels like we've never left. But in fact, we had an adjournment from December until February 18, and, prior to that, we had a very long recess. We rose in June and this government, in its wisdom, made the decision not to come back to Queen's Park at all for all of September and virtually all of October.

When I talk about the way things work in this place, we have a process by which the estimates committee of the Legislature gets to select ministries that it is going to

review in depth—in considerable depth. They can spend up to 60 hours reviewing, dissecting, probing, analyzing expenditure decisions of this government, and they can do that for up to 12 ministries. But the standing orders also say that that review has to be complete by the third Thursday of November, and because MPPs were not here participating in the estimates committee, only four ministries got reviewed. We had the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Transportation and, very, very briefly, there was an opportunity to look into the Ministry of Infrastructure.

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But this unprecedented five-month recess was only called because the Conservative government now has a Premier who has the lowest popularity of any premier in Canada—and probably in history—and he wanted to avoid being on the front pages of the media, because they know that the spending decisions that they set out in their spring budget, which were going to be examined by the estimates committee, are not supported by the people of this province. We have seen what happens in the media when MPPs come back to the Legislature and the official opposition has the opportunity to ask this government questions about their spending decisions, about the policy decisions that they are making.

Anyway, because of the timelines that the estimates committee was working within, there was no opportunity to review some very, very critical ministries. There was no opportunity to look at the estimates for the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. I want to give a shout-out to my colleague the member for Hamilton Mountain, who has been an indefatigable champion on the rights of children with autism, and the inability of these kids to access the services that they need to thrive.

I want to give a shout-out to my colleague the member for Windsor West, who has done such incredible work advocating for adults with disabilities. She has brought in private member's bills to make the seamless transition from the youth system to the adult system for people who have developmental disabilities.

They would have had some really good questions to ask at that estimates committee about what is happening to the funding that this ministry has said they are committing to but which we heard today, in a report from the Financial Accountability Officer, is not actually being delivered.

My colleague the member for Toronto—St. Paul's might have had some good questions to ask this government about funding for rape crisis centres, especially in light of today's announcement that the \$1 million—that was totally inadequate at the time—that was provided last spring is not going to be continued. This is devastating to women and children who are fleeing violence, who are trying to regain their lives and carry forward in dealing with the trauma of the violence that they have experienced.

I wanted to give some insights based on what's happening in my community. In June of this summer, Anova, which is a joint agency that provides services both for sexual assault survivors and domestic violence survivors, to

announced that they were forced to turn away women over 2,500 times from shelter last year due to lack of beds. Earlier, when the government did make its \$1-million commitment, they wrote a letter to all of the MPPs in the London area, and they pointed out that the \$1 million in additional one-time funding to sexual assault centres is woefully inadequate—woefully inadequate—in the face of having to turn away women 2,500 times from shelter. Now this government has decided to cut even that completely inadequate amount.

The estimates committee didn't get a chance to look at the spending for the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, and you can imagine the kinds of questions that the official opposition would have had for the officials from that ministry. We are living through a time when climate change is mobilizing people in unprecedented ways. People are recognizing that we are in the face of a climate emergency, that we have a moral and ethical obligation to take action. Yet we see, at the centrepiece of this government's environmental action plan, a Provincial Day of Action on Litter. That is not the kind of action that Ontarians expect.

Those are the kinds of questions that we would have asked at estimates committee, had this government not recessed for September and October and prevented us from having that opportunity.

One of the things that we did get a chance to look at was health care. I want to give some recognition to the Financial Accountability Officer, who has been releasing very, very useful information about what is actually happening to the state of this province's finances. We know from the Financial Accountability Officer that this government is seriously underspending its health care budget in relation to population growth and demographic change. We saw a report recently from the FAO that health sector expenses are going to grow at an average annual rate of 1.8% when they should be growing at an average annual rate of 4.1%, if we are to actually meet the needs of the people in this province.

Speaker, I want to share with you some of the headlines in the media from my community which really capture what this underfunding in health care is doing to places like London, to the communities that all of us represent.

Here's an article from the London Free Press on January 23, just a couple of months ago: "Lack of Resources' Costs London its Top Heart Doctor.

"London has lost its top heart doctor, who charges London Health Sciences Centre no longer considers cardiac care a top priority as it makes cuts to reduce its deficit"—a deficit that was created by this government's decision not to fund health care at the rate it should be funded.

Another article from January 25: "Only Cash Can Fix London Area's Worst-in-Ontario Waits for Hip, Knee Replacements: Doctor.

"London-area waits for hip and knee replacements are the longest in Ontario, a chronic problem that can only be improved with more provincial money."

Here's another one: "Transplant Unit Another LHSC Program Eroded by Cuts, Departures ...

"Another high-profile London doctor is sounding off about budget cuts at the London Health Sciences Centre, this time involving its organ transplant program, saying he quit his job because 'I was tired of banging my head against the wall.'" That's from February 5, 2020.

How about this one from February 25, just a week or so ago? "London Health Sciences Centre Cuts Back Psychology Program for Patients Coping with Medical Issues.

"Cash-strapped London Health Sciences Centre is cutting back a psychology program that helps about 130 patients cope with their medical issues."

Speaker, at the same time that we're talking about estimates, we're debating in this place a bill about home care. This is an interesting story that people should want to hear about. February 26, a CBC story: A 105-year-old woman had her home care reduced from three visits a week to one visit a week—one visit a week, because she had a friend who was coming in to help her continue to live independently.

Or how about this one? This one was also from February 25, from CTV: A dementia patient was mistakenly locked in London Health Sciences Centre's seclusion rooms for six days, because she wasn't supposed to be in the mental health unit; she was supposed to be in the dementia unit. The VP of mental health apologized profusely—as he should—to this patient and her family, but he says, "That's in a context of an upstream and downstream capacity as well, all of which are stretched currently in Ontario."

This government's spending decisions are having an immediate and direct impact on the people that we represent in Ontario. Ironically, despite what they say or think over on the other side, they're not doing anything for business confidence. We saw the Ontario Chamber of Commerce just release its Ontario Economic Report 2020, which says that business confidence is the second-lowest it has ever been since 2012. Just in the last year, from 2019 to 2020, there was a drop of seven points in terms of the confidence of the business community in the Ontario economy.

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This government's decisions are undermining the things that businesses need to thrive. They need a stable health care system that's going to keep their employees healthy and able to go to work and be productive. They need a strong education system, both K-to-12 and post-secondary, that's going to build the pipeline of employees they're going to be looking to hire, build those innovative thinkers who are going to grow Ontario's economy. They need housing that employees can live in. They need affordable homes. All of these things are being undermined by the spending decisions of this government.

Speaker, I said at the beginning that we do not concur with the estimates of this government and we will be proud to vote in opposition.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Stan Cho: It's a pleasure to rise in the House today to talk about concurrence in the estimates. I know that my

colleagues the member for Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill and the member for Mississauga–Lakeshore spoke at length about the process for concurrence, the fiscal position inherited by this government and the investments our government is making in critical programs and services. So I'd like to use my time to talk more about the progress our government has made in returning this province to a position of fiscal sustainability, while restoring trust, transparency and accountability in Ontario's finances.

We're ensuring that oversight on spending is strengthened, so that our success is not measured just by the dollars spent, but by the outcomes provided to the hard-working Ontario families who rely on this government. When our government was elected, we promised Ontarians that we would spend their tax dollars wisely, that we would respect the taxpayers of this province. We've made significant steps towards not just accomplishing that goal today, but ensuring that future governments of any political stripe will be held accountable to new, higher standards of fiscal stewardship. And we've done all of this while making life more affordable for families, by putting more money back into the pockets of hard-working Ontarians, with lower income taxes for Ontario workers, including those living on minimum wage; by providing parents with a refundable tax credit for child care costs, which helped make child care more affordable for about 300,000 families in 2019; and by creating the conditions for economic prosperity and unparalleled job creation, to the tune of over 300,000 jobs in just the last 633 days—all in all, building a better, more prosperous Ontario. But our government is committed to doing more.

The choices that we have made are delivering those results Ontarians are looking for. In January, the Minister of Finance released the government's 2019-20 third-quarter financial update. Total revenue in 2019-20 is projected to be \$3.1 billion higher than projected in last year's budget. This reflects that strong job growth I referenced earlier, rising household incomes and strengthening home resales. Interest on debt expense—my colleague from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill spoke at length about that—is projected to be \$630 million lower in the 2019-20 budget than forecasted in 2019.

Speaker, this is proof point that shows what this government has been saying since day one: Every single dollar servicing debt is one more dollar that can go to ensuring the sustainability of services that the people of Ontario rely on. That's why we have been and will continue to be laser-focused on reducing Ontario's debt and deficit.

The 2019-20 third-quarter finances also project that program expenses will be \$2.5 billion higher compared to the projection in the 2019 budget. This demonstrates, in black and white, despite erroneous claims of cuts from the members opposite, that the government is continuing to invest in Ontario, investing in health care, in education and social services.

In fact, I will reference the FAO report itself and quote it, where it says that every sector—here's the most important line: In the education sector, \$576 million more

was spent than planned. For the members opposite, I'm happy to provide a copy of the FAO report, which tells us that our plan is working while we are continuing to invest in those core programs and services, like health care and education, that the hard-working people of Ontario rely on.

I'll say again that we view this task not just as a financial imperative but as a moral one. That's not a tag line, Mr. Speaker; that's a creed. And that's about the type of province we want to build together. Without fiscal sustainability in our province, our loved ones are treated in hospital hallways, our schools fall into disrepair, our public services go unfunded and our neighbourhoods are not as safe. Without fiscal sustainability in this province, we will continue to pay billions of dollars every year on interest.

So I ask every member of this House: is it acceptable that in the last 50 years, this province has achieved surplus in only seven—seven—out of 50 years? Is it acceptable that after a decade of uninterrupted economic recovery under the Liberals, Ontario still has a structural deficit? Is it acceptable that Ontario's annual interest payments are larger than the annual budget of all but three provincial line ministries? Is it acceptable that in a little over a month—and the member opposite just referenced the importance of addressing climate change, so I ask the member opposite to please listen to this—is it acceptable, to the member opposite, that in just 47 days, we pay more in interest than the total spending of every Ministry of the Environment in every province in Canada and the federal government?

Mr. Mike Harris: Unacceptable.

Mr. Billy Pang: Unacceptable.

Mr. Stan Cho: Mr. Speaker, I also find it unacceptable. At least the government members find it unacceptable that we can kick that can of debt down the road and leave our children and their children to deal with it.

The answer from this side and from the government members opposite is a resounding no. I know that members of the government find it completely unacceptable, morally reprehensible, to think about leaving our next generation in worse shape than we are.

My parents moved to this country with very little and they worked really hard. They always told me as I was growing up that their measure of success wasn't the dollars in the bank account or the cars in the driveway; it was making sure that me and my little sister and my little brother had more than they had. I challenge you to come up with a better definition of success: that success is defined by the fact that we are leaving the future generations with more than we had. That is the intent of this government.

Unlike the members opposite, we reject the generational inequality outright. We know it's wrong to spend recklessly today and leave the consequences for our children and their children to deal with. The dream of home ownership, the ability to support a family, the possibility of entrepreneurship and a good-paying job should not be out of reach in this great province. That's why we're determined to transform government, to ensure sustainability

for generations to come. This is our opportunity to do government differently.

Speaker, my colleague here was talking about the smarter government initiatives and mentioned a number of measures that this government has taken to make government smarter. One of the measures he mentioned was the review of 191 agencies, boards and commissions in this province—provincial agencies. My colleague the MPP for Brantford—Brant co-chaired that task force. Did you know that in this province, there were agencies that had not been active for a quarter-century? I ask members of all sides of this House: Is that an acceptable use of taxpayer resources? I certainly think it's not.

1700

We also looked for shared efficiencies that could be in the front office or the back office. We also looked for duplication, Mr. Speaker, and there was a lot of duplication throughout those agencies, boards and commissions. This is spending smarter. This is about smarter government.

It's not just the agencies, boards and commissions review. It's the procurement reform that the member also referred to. I'd like to use some tangible examples from that, Mr. Speaker, because this is important to understand that there is a way to do government better, that there is a way to have better outcomes, while managing our fiscal situation.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Hamilton Mountain will come to order.

Mr. Stan Cho: Speaker, I'd like to mention some of those examples that we found. Today, in our health care system—let's take a hospital operating room, for example. We can't fault these hospital operating rooms to be on a budget, and these budgets are examined carefully. What we don't hear, sometimes, is how that affects how surgeons are using materials in that particular hospital. Let's say, for example, that a surgeon is going into an operation and needs surgical gloves. Well, what we don't hear is that, because of the hospital's budget decision to buy a particular glove, that surgeon is actually doubling or tripling up on those gloves due to their inferior quality. Had the budget decision makers considered a surgical glove that costs 20% more, it would have lasted much longer.

Value for money and life-cycle costs: These are things that the government needs to make sure that the agencies, boards and commissions review and the procurement reform are addressing, because there is money to be saved and there are better outcomes to be achieved.

Let me reference another example. In today's climate, Mr. Speaker, if you are hurt in Orillia, and Orillia EMS shows up and determines that you need an intravenous drip, they put the IV drip in your arm, and then realize your injuries are very serious and you need to be flown to Toronto General. Well, when Ornge air ambulance arrives, they need to take that perfectly good IV out of your arm and replace it with another one. Why? Because Ornge air ambulance and Orillia EMS purchase from different

suppliers. Worse yet, when that patient gets to Toronto General, that IV has to be replaced for a second time, for the same reason. That is triple the taxpayer cost and, worse yet, it is discomfort for the patient, and worse outcomes for the people of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, our procurement reform—this is exactly the reason we're introducing it. This is what we're referring to when we say "smarter government": that there is a way to balance fiscal responsibility with those better outcomes, and I would encourage all members of this House to help us find those examples that we can target very specifically. So I'm proud—

Interjection.

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you. Yes, it is a great example of how we can do government smarter, and that's one example out of thousands of savings that we can find. I know that members opposite have criticized this as just being about buying at Costco. That's not it. Buying in bulk, of course, has its advantages, but it's also about those better outcomes for the people of Ontario. They demand it, they expect it and they deserve it.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance is about to table a budget—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Hamilton Mountain is warned.

Mr. Stan Cho: —and it's a plan to build our province together, to balance the budget in a responsible and pragmatic way that creates jobs, that fights red tape and continues to allow for the conditions for prosperity in this great province of ours. We know that we need to maximize that value of the dollar every single day. Looking at the government expenditures in a new, more critical way means that we're going to find efficiencies and that we can project the long-term sustainability of those public services.

This is about rebuilding our province and it's about allowing the great people of Ontario to flourish. It's about a future where our kids can finish school and, instead of struggling to find a job and putting their future on hold, these bright, young minds can put their creative talents to use, leading the world and Ontario into our shared future—a shared future where we enjoy world-class infrastructure and public transit, letting us get home to our families faster after work, where we do government differently. When we have a government that is financially stable, we have a future in this province that is financially stable—a province that works for all of us.

I'm proud of the responsible approach we're taking in this government, and I will say that I believe that what we have done is working. Don't take our word for it. I'm referencing an article from TVO which said that a couple of years ago, the federal Parliamentary Budget Office released a report on the fiscal sustainability of government. This included Ontario, and it found that Ontario had a fiscal gap of 0.9% of GDP, meaning that the government either needed to raise taxes or cut spending by that much, and 1% of GDP amounts to \$7 billion or so.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it's two years later and the PBO has updated spreadsheets with new data, and it shows that

things have changed a little bit. It shows that Ontario's fiscal gap is actually much smaller, only 0.1% of GDP. This is a sign of things working. And I will say that this is a sign of responsible government, a government that understands this isn't just about sound bites, being in the media and screaming at the top of your lungs, screaming "Cuts, cuts, cuts," when there are no cuts.

Mr. Speaker, this is about those difficult decisions, measured decisions that think about not just the dollars spent but the outcome, and not just the outcomes today but the outcomes for tomorrow, because I too believe that the measure of success is making sure that the next generation has more than we had, and that's what this government is going to do. I'm proud to talk to the concurrence in estimates, and I hope all members of this House will vote in support.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Bethlenfalvy has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, including supplementaries. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being requested, this vote will be taken during deferred votes.

Mr. Bethlenfalvy has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Education, including supplementaries. 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 requested, this vote will be taken during deferred votes.

Mr. Bethlenfalvy has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Transportation. 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 requested, this vote will be taken during deferred votes.

Mr. Bethlenfalvy has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Infrastructure. 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 requested, this vote will be taken during deferred votes.

Mr. Bethlenfalvy has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, including supplementaries. 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 will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being requested, this vote will be taken during deferred votes.

Mr. Bethlenfalvy has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. 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 requested, this vote will be taken during deferred votes.

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Mr. Bethlenfalvy has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, including supplementaries. 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 will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being requested, this vote will be taken during deferred votes.

Votes deferred.

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO HOME AND COMMUNITY CARE ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 POUR CONNECTER LA POPULATION AUX SERVICES DE SOINS À DOMICILE ET EN MILIEU COMMUNAUTAIRE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 4, 2020, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 175, An Act to amend and repeal various Acts respecting home care and community services / Projet de loi 175, Loi modifiant et abrogeant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les services de soins à domicile et en milieu communautaire.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): When we last debated this, we were in questions and responses. Mr. Piccini, you have one minute and 58 seconds, and it goes over to this side. I recognize the member from London—Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you so much, Speaker. This bill is going to mean astronomical change in the health care system. One of the things that it identifies—it talks about residential congregate care models, yet in the bill, there's no explanation or definition of what that looks like. On this side of the House, we need to understand what the government thinks about what kind of model that will be. And so I ask the member: What are residential congregate care models, and should we be concerned that these kinds of models will be impacting our constituents?

Mr. David Piccini: Currently, there are no oversight models, and we're putting it in in this piece of legislation. I would just say—that's a direct response to the member opposite—this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, is doing more than just that. It's embedding the decision-making and home and community care into our Ontario health

teams. It's localized. It's really localized. For communities like mine, in rural Ontario, this is critical because our planning table at the local level—there are 13 partners in my area. These are expert, front-line health care workers making the decisions that are best reflective of the needs of patients. So I'm really proud to see an outdated and old, 25-plus-year model being replaced with something that is reflective of localized needs and wraps our arms around the needs of the patients at the local level.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Unfortunately, there is no more time for questions and responses. Therefore, further debate.

Mr. Jeff Burch: It's an honour to rise today to speak to Bill 175. Like many colleagues in this House, I have personal experience with home and community care, as well as some professional experience that I intend to speak about today.

This bill represents the next phase in this government's plan to overhaul Ontario's health care system. Bill 175 is set up as enabling legislation; in other words, the bill itself is sparse in detail but gives this Conservative government the regulation-making authority to develop details.

They claim that this bill will fix gaps in care coordination by giving Ontarians more choice in health service providers and allowing health service providers to directly coordinate care. We should note that, in contrast to this claim, there are no legislative guarantees in this bill to fix these issues. In fact, Bill 175 fails to address the key issues that continue to plague the home and community care sector: personal support worker shortages, labour retention, inconsistent quality of care provided, and lack of accountability and transparency.

Bill 175 is made up of three schedules. Schedule 1 amends the Connecting Care Act, 2019, which was created by Bill 74, the Conservative government's architectural health care legislation. Schedule 2 amends the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Act to allow the minister to enter into agreements with Indigenous organizations to provide home and community care, recover costs and collect personal information. Schedule 3 repeals the Home and Community Services Act and amends other health legislation.

We have a number of concerns with this bill, Speaker. The first is increased privatization, and I'll speak at length about that with my professional experience. The government suggests that Bill 175 enables more choice. The true function of this bill is that it allows health service providers and/or Ontario health teams to further contract out home care services and have even less accountability and transparency. There are no clear rules on how the residential congregate care model spaces will be regulated, and who can provide care in these settings, because the government has chosen not to define them.

To echo a point that my colleague from London—Fanshawe articulated, taxpayers pay good money for home and community care services, but in this heavily privatized sector, their money never makes it to the actual home care workers nor does it go towards providing care. It's a highly profitable sector that Ontario taxpayers bear

the cost of, multiple times over. They pay once with their taxes, another when they have to take time off work to care for their loved ones, and again when they pay to supplement whatever little home care they are receiving.

Another concern, Speaker, is the voucher system, or self-directed care. This bill removes the restrictions on self-directed care where currently only LHINs can fund self-directed care. Self-directed care doesn't guarantee quality of care and, as a result, likely doesn't address the root problems in the sector that have led to the growing number of alternative-level-of-care patients in hospital beds, contributing to hallway medicine, which I'll talk about shortly.

Ontario's home care sector already has little oversight. Bill 175 exacerbates this issue. By enabling the ability to contract out services, it further removes oversight and accountability measures that observe whether publicly funded home and community care services actually support the people who receive them. There's almost no legislative provision to hold the Ministry of Health, Ontario Health, Ontario health teams or health service providers accountable. This lack of accountability is particularly concerning, given the rise of complaints of inadequate or poor service, such as home care providers who don't send staff on time or who fail to show up for their shift altogether.

I've heard from many of my constituents about the issues surrounding the current PSW shortage. In order to properly address home care concerns, we must address the PSW shortage. Bill 175 doesn't once mention a strategy that would ensure the development and implementation of a health human resources strategy to stabilize the sector and retain PSWs.

Mr. Speaker, this is a long-standing problem, and I just want to talk a little bit about my own experience professionally. For about 10 years, from 1999 to 2009, I worked on staff with Service Employees International Union Healthcare—SEIU Healthcare—and after a few years working in hospitals, moved on to representing home care workers. I represented all of the Red Cross workers in the Niagara region and was responsible for negotiating a number of contracts with companies like ComCare in Toronto. These are workers making terrible wages, working erratic hours, not getting paid for travel, using their own money for care. Unfortunately, not much has changed. The Liberals had many, many years to fix this. There was a lot of talk but no action, and unfortunately this bill doesn't fix the problem either.

Home care workers are working for wages that are far less than a living wage, and if we're going to expect, and pay on our behalf, people to take care of our parents and grandparents in their homes, we should at least pay them enough so that they can afford to live. I know a living wage in my area is around \$18 an hour. Many of these health care aides, PSWs and home care workers are making much, much less than that.

I want to talk a little bit about for-profit care. Later, after representing home care workers, I represented PSWs in long-term-care and retirement homes across Ontario,

where I learned a lot about the profit motive in health care. There are a lot of stories I could tell you, Speaker, not very pleasant ones, about some of the retirement homes on, let's say, the low end of care in Ontario.

1720

One particular instance I remember was some PSWs and health care aides in a retirement home who broke into a cabinet one night to get diapers. The reason they had to break into the cabinet was because the owner and operator of the retirement home figured out that diapers are expensive, so they would lock them away and ration them. The employees were so upset by this that they broke into the cabinet and were disciplined. As a union, we had to represent them. I'll tell you, when it gets to the point where the profit motive is such that employers are locking up diapers in a cabinet to cut costs, that's the kind of profit motive that we on this side of the House are talking about when you introduce for-profit care into the system.

Later on, before I left SEIU, I was a first-contract negotiator. We negotiated the first retirement home collective agreement for the province of Ontario between a large employer and a union—14 retirement homes. I got to see first-hand the kinds of issues that come to the bargaining table when you're dealing with for-profit care, because they have to answer to their shareholders. That becomes a very real thing at the bargaining table.

One of the things that kept recurring is that you have these classifications in retirement homes, and they have a scope of practice. What for-profit employers will do is they will create new classifications that are lower-paid, and then they will take work duties from the higher-paying classifications so that they can get rid of more expensive employees, and end up having unqualified employees delivering care and dispensing medication and those kinds of things. That's what happens when you introduce a for-profit motive into our system. I've seen it first-hand, and that's what will happen if that's the road this government is going down.

I want to turn to a little bit of personal experience I have as well. About seven years ago, my father suffered a stroke and ended up in a hospital, where he was a victim of hallway medicine. He waited 36 hours in an emergency room. He ended up paralyzed. My mother now cares for him 24/7 in a somewhat independent care setting where they depend on PSWs every day—the kinds of things that people are coming to me with, and my own mother is experiencing: a lack of continuity of care and a lack of dependability when you don't have that continuity of care. The spouse, for example, doesn't get any respite. There are serious health and safety issues with things like lifting and bathing, because with the PSW shortage that we're experiencing all across Ontario, more and more spouses and family members are being counted on to act as PSWs, because the PSWs just aren't there. Our loved ones risk injuring themselves when they're trying to do the jobs that should be done by PSWs.

These are the kinds of things that people all across Ontario are dealing with. This government has put a bill forward that doesn't address any of the core issues that we should be trying to address.

In my riding of Niagara Centre, we've seen this PSW shortage in full force. Peter Grampola, a 68-year-old Thorold resident, has been desperately trying to get home. Despite suffering from a serious illness that brought him to the Greater Niagara General Hospital, he had no choice but to remain there for over half a year due to PSW shortages. After a month in the hospital, his doctors gave him the green light to return home, so long as home care services were available.

My office talked to his wife, Nancy, this morning. She said, "We could not get home care. Because he ended up in the hospital last year, we waited five months and there was no home care available. He needed a lift in the house and I couldn't afford one. We had to use family-managed care. Every month, I have to get a report. They have allowed for 2.5 hours a day. The private companies would only come for 3.5 hours at a time, and the LHINs wouldn't cover that. I had to become power of attorney, I had to increase the insurance on my house, I had to open a new bank account because they wouldn't let me use my previous one." That is a common story from across the province.

Sue VanderBent, chief executive of Home Care Ontario, an umbrella group for Ontario's home care providers, called the PSW shortage "critical." In an interview with the St. Catharines Standard, she outlined that this new legislation will require more PSWs. She said that "Niagara has been hard hit by the shortage, too, because of the region's higher than average senior population...."

"Home Care Ontario is urging the province to increase funding for PSWs working in the home care sector by five per cent in each of the next three years, to bring their salaries in line with PSWs working in other health-care settings"—not to create bureaucracy, but to put money towards the actual problem and find solutions.

Information provided on the Home Care Ontario website estimates the cost of a hospital stay at \$842 daily. In comparison, home care services cost about \$42 a day. This is the critical issue. This is what I think people across Ontario don't understand about the last government and now about this government. It's actually fiscally responsible—it makes sense—to invest in home care. It makes no sense not to.

In 2010, 10 years ago, one of my predecessors, Peter Kormos, was in this Legislature outlining the cost savings and benefits of investing in home care as opposed to keeping people in the hospital. He said, "Never mind being cruel, it doesn't make good fiscal sense." Ten years ago, his office was dealing with a case nearly identical to Peter Grampola's—10 years ago. For over a decade, we've been advocating to Liberal and Conservative governments to invest in home care because it makes financial sense.

Just last week, I was in this House talking about a Welland senior who's stuck in a hospital bed, Paul Lapointe—he has been there for almost a year—being told that he may have to wait five years for a long-term-care bed. He said that today's seniors are being treated as the forgotten generation.

This has been going on for 10 years. As Peter Kormos said, “The good people of Ontario don’t see good government as government that won’t listen to seniors when it comes to their concerns, that won’t listen to people who are languishing in hospitals ready to be discharged but who can’t be because this minister and this government won’t fund even two hours a day of home care for them.” That was 10 years ago. Nothing has been done up to the present day, and this bill is not going to address the problem.

Front-line workers are essential. SEIU Healthcare’s president, Sharleen Stewart, released a statement saying, “Front-line workers and their unions were given zero opportunity to provide input into the overhaul of Ontario’s home care system. The legislation appears to have been written behind closed doors with the operators who stand to profit from the reforms.

“Doug Ford’s government is handing the keys to our health care system to the rich executives who can’t properly run their own businesses. Today’s announcement proves the Ford government is again putting front-line workers in the backseat to a privatization agenda....

“Without a commitment to raising the wages of low-paid health care workers, deliver safe working conditions through adequate training, and secure pensions, any attempt to address the recruitment and retention crisis will fail.”

This isn’t that complicated, Speaker. We have a PSW shortage. They’re not being paid enough. The work is sporadic. They’re not being treated properly. They’re not being trained properly. The money is not being invested. The money that is invested to go toward home care will save us money when we don’t have to pay for a hospital bed at 840-some dollars a day.

Home care and community care service providers are often left between a rock and a hard place. PSWs are stretched thin, facing intense time and labour shortages, struggling under the burdens of low compensation and inconsistent schedules. They’re given insufficient time to complete the scheduled care plans, not compensated for their travel time and expenses—a chronic problem; it has been like this for decades—and face the daily threat of violence with little to no support. When workers injure themselves at work and have to take time off, when they leave their jobs, or when they are reassigned, families are often left without care, sometimes for months, because there are no workers to replace them. And even when there are workers to replace them—Speaker, I can speak to this from personal experience with my own family, and I’m sure members in this House have heard it from their own constituents many times. If you have inconsistency, what constituents will often say to you is, “I feel like I have to train a new person every couple of days.”

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These care workers are extremely important. They learn how to care for their patients, and if they change every few days, as is the case when we don’t have enough of them, when we have recruitment and retention problems, it drastically affects patient care.

They also struggle with inconsistent hours of work. They’re required to work in the morning to help get clients out of bed, toileted, bathed and fed. Then the workers are often required to return in the evening to help get those clients to bed. People can’t survive working just two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening.

Sue VanderBent, CEO of Home Care Ontario, said, “That is leaving a big hole in the day in terms of work.... We have to recruit people with a good salary ... and we have to also give them hours, so that they are able to make a living wage.” I see that as key, Speaker. How can we ask people to care for our families if we don’t care enough about them to pay them a wage that they can live on?

Melissa Wood with Unifor says working in an understaffed environment is difficult for residents and employees. She said, “It leaves them feeling, besides emotionally, mentally and physically exhausted, most of them end up leaving depressed. I spend many nights on the phone talking with different people who work in long-term care and they’re actually crying. They’re crying because they’re exhausted. They’re crying because of residents not getting the care that they need because they don’t have the time in a day to do it.” Working in an understaffed environment is a breeding ground for dangerous situations that put everyone at risk of violence: patients, staff, and loved ones.

In a recent report from Unifor, they heard reports from across the province about poor pay, precarious labour conditions and few or no benefits. Everywhere we see the complexity and heaviness of care increasing, meaning that more care is needed, yet staffing levels go down.

They heard that PSW program enrolment is down in all areas where round tables were held by the union, meaning that shortages cannot be offset by new graduates. This is a problem that will continue in the future. They also found high turnover rates, not just for PSWs but also for management staff. To quote from their report: “The personal support workers who came to share their stories and ideas painted a vivid and disturbing picture of the conditions of their work and the quality of care and life for the residents.”

We’ve been hearing stories of PSWs going in to visit and care for patients on their days off and working longer, unpaid hours because they see how this unfair system has left their patients out in the cold. They’ve taken it upon themselves to fix the glaring gaps in the system on their own time and their own dime, out of the goodness of their hearts. This system is taking advantage of the goodwill of health care workers.

Ontarians deserve better home care, and they deserve it now. With the looming aging crisis, we cannot wait until another government does another surface-level rejig of this system.

Speaker, we can do better than this.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Time for questions. I recognize the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, Speaker. It’s nice to see you in the chair.

When I was campaigning leading up to the election, one of the most common complaints I heard from my constituents, from people right across Ontario, concerned the LHIN. Families are frustrated, we're frustrated with this bloated bureaucracy which diverted hundreds of millions of dollars from front-line workers to administration. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition actually once called for the LHIN to be disbanded, to be shut down.

My question to the member from Niagara Centre: Do you not see the value in transitioning our workers to the plan that we've put forward to the community, or do you really believe that the LHIN is the proper way to provide support to Ontarians?

Mr. Jeff Burch: I thank the member for the question. I'm not sure what is being referred to when they say "the plan put forward." As I mentioned, this isn't really a plan to fix anything. I think I've detailed in this discussion what I think needs to be done, and it's not what this government is doing, which I don't see as getting rid of bureaucracy; I see it as just trading bureaucracy for bureaucracy. What I see as real solutions to this problem is making a real commitment with real funds towards paying workers a fair wage with pensions and benefits to do a good job through publicly administered home care that will properly treat our parents and grandparents in nursing homes and facilities across the country.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from London–Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to thank the member from Niagara Centre for his debate on Bill 175. He mentioned that he has represented PSWs for a for-profit long-term-care home. I'd like the member to describe the advantages between those two models around the quality of care—a for-profit model compared to a non-profit model—and what that quality of care looks like on the front lines between those two?

Mr. Jeff Burch: I thank the member from London–Fanshawe for the question. I noticed a big difference. Of course, I represented both nursing homes and retirement homes, as well as not-for-profits and for-profits in the home care sector. As I mentioned when I was speaking, I especially noticed it at the bargaining table, because when you sit at the bargaining table with an employer that's for-profit, you realize that their focus—it's not that they don't care about care, but the profit motive has been inserted into negotiations so that what they care about is making their shareholders happy, and that often involves cutting costs, and the main issue is not good care, it's often cutting costs. That's the big difference.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Deepak Anand: I want to talk about one of my residents. His name is Balraj Grewal, and his wife works for a warehouse and they have two growing children. Balraj's mom is not well and is getting home care. The biggest challenge that he always had is calling different people, calling different agencies. When she goes to the hospital and comes back, he doesn't know what to do and who to call, and when he calls, it takes forever. Then,

either they have to compromise on taking their children to activities or taking time off or whatever it takes, but it is not working. That's what I always hear.

With this bill, we are ensuring that care coordination decisions are made close to the patient instead of in an unaccountable bureaucracy. So I want to ask, can the member opposite point to a solution where a one-size-fits-all approach, like the one they are supporting, actually improves these services for patients?

Mr. Jeff Burch: I appreciate the question from the member from Mississauga–Malton. In the first part of his question, he talks about the difficulties in finding PSWs. I spoke about that as well, and I completely agree with him. But the core problem with PSWs, as I mentioned, was that we aren't training enough of them and we're not paying them properly and we're not treating them properly. If we did that, we would have enough PSWs for people to depend on, regardless of what setting it's in.

So, again, the members want to keep coming back to this thing about bureaucracy—trading one bureaucracy for another bureaucracy doesn't solve the problem; addressing the core issues is what we need to do, and the core issues are making sure that we have properly publicly funded home care with properly paid employees that are well trained.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Now I recognize the member from London–Fanshawe for a question.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The background around this bill: It seems that this government started in February 2019 and, over the year, announced things. There have been op-eds, and they're all in favour. There are a lot of for-profit organizations, some not-for-profit, and they're enthusiastic to caution committing to this bill. But I noticed that the SEIU has specifically stated that unions and front-line workers were not consulted.

So I would like to ask the member if he could comment on why he thinks this government wouldn't have consulted unions and front-line workers in order to get some feedback on how this bill should work when it comes to quality of care.

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Mr. Jeff Burch: I appreciate the question. It would be worth repeating some of the quote from Sharleen Stewart, who is the president of SEIU. That union did consult with the workers, and they have been doing it for many years. They've been providing the government with the results of their consultations. Year after year, decade after decade, home care workers have been clearly telling governments that they need work that is not precarious, that they need to be properly supported, that we need to properly pay them, and that we need to make sure that they're properly trained. That is really at the core of providing good-quality home care.

When the government is not consulting with front-line workers but they are consulting with those who will make profits, they're obviously going to get advice that is not beneficial to the workers; it's beneficial to shareholders.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): For further questions, I recognize the member from Niagara West.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member from Niagara Centre for speaking about this legislation this afternoon. The member has spoken about long-term care in the Niagara region many times. I know it is something he cares about a great deal in his riding, which is why I hope the member would support the legislation.

One of the pieces I've heard from constituents who are very supportive of this piece is around raising the maximum care limits. We need to ensure that we have the supports in place such that patients can access care no matter what is going on in their life; that they're able to access that care without a fear of reaching that maximum cap. My question to the member opposite is: Is he defending the status quo when it comes to the way things are currently?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member from Niagara West for the question. I know that he cares about this issue as well. It's a very acute issue, especially in Niagara. We have one of the most aging populations anywhere in Canada, actually.

I don't defend the status quo. The whole point of the 20 minutes that I was speaking was that this issue started many years ago. The Liberals did almost nothing on this issue, despite being told over and over again, despite the fact that investing in home care will actually save us money because it's much more expensive to pay for a hospital bed. My friend knows that we have that problem in Niagara. So I would love to see a bill that actually addresses that problem and that puts real money toward real solutions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I listened intently over the last few days to what the government members have said and what the opposition members have said, and what I'm not hearing from the government side of the House—when they talk about having PSWs, the front-line workers that provide the care, they're not talking about the fact that these PSWs are underpaid and that they are not fairly compensated for their mileage, for the extra time that they do. They're not talking about quality of care. They're not talking about the fact that we have people with developmental disabilities in long-term-care centres that these PSWs are doing their very best to provide care for.

I'm wondering if the member from Niagara Centre could maybe talk about if there is indeed something in the bill that addresses the fact we need safe workplaces for these workers but we also need fair compensation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member. You have limited time.

Mr. Jeff Burch: The answer is no. I thank the member for the question. I agree with all of her comments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Dave Smith: We've had a fair bit of debate about this bill so far, but I'd like to take a little bit of a step back in time. What we're trying to do is we're trying to modernize a system that was put in place in the 1990s. It's

health care that we're talking about, so I want to start off by talking about some of the advancements in health care since the original legislation was put in place.

Information technology is just a great place to start. When the health care act was put in that this is actually going to update and modernize, a 486 computer and the first-generation Pentiums were what was being used. We didn't have the Internet. It wasn't something that was readily in use. Arcnet was there and there was sharing amongst universities, but the Internet as we know it today didn't exist.

You might be saying to me, "What does that matter when it comes to health care?" There have been significant advancements in health care as a result of information technology. Stem cell therapies were something that was very experimental and conceptual back in the 1990s. HIV and AIDS was something that was still very prevalent, at the forefront. If you were diagnosed as HIV-positive, that was considered a terminal illness. That was a death sentence for someone. There have been enough advances now that it's treated more like a chronic disease, and it's not the same situation as it was in the 1990s.

Minimally invasive surgeries were not prevalent. It wasn't possible for someone with a heart condition to go in to see the doctor, have that heart procedure done and, within 24 hours, be doing something else. I'm going to talk about one of my constituents, in particular, on that, a gentleman I know very, very well. He's been involved in a lot of different things with me over the years. I've known him for about 15 years now. He had an issue with his heart. He actually had a heart attack while he was with the cardiologist, and they put a stent in, right there. The following day, he was at church as the church organist. That's something that would never have been thought of in our health care system in the 1990s.

Probably one of the greatest advancements is functional MRIs. No one would have ever thought that you could have a patient completely awake and having an MRI while performing simple tasks, so that the doctor could see the activity that was going on in the brain.

These are advancements that have happened in medicine since the 1990s, since the original legislation that we're trying to update. We need to make that update. We need to modernize our system. We need to be looking at how the system can better serve patients. For the longest time—and my friend from Niagara Centre talked about some of the challenges over the last 10 years, some of the things that the previous system was not able to do. We need to have legislation in place that takes advantage of what we now know. We need to have legislation in place that looks at the overall health of the patient first, and is patient-centric and not system-centric. We need to be able to do things where we're looking at the overall health of that individual patient, and we need to be looking at what we can do to better serve them, what we can do to make sure that they get the best health outcome.

Back in the 1990s, the average life expectancy for somebody in Ontario was around 75—a little bit more for someone who was female; a little bit less for someone who

was male. Today, our life expectancy in Ontario is about 80 to 81—again, a little more for someone who is female; just slightly less for some who's male. We have significant advancements. We're living longer, and we need to make sure that we have health care legislation that reflects that and reflects the current needs of people.

We're changing our delivery models so that we're more innovative, so that we're focusing on those things. Our health teams will be able to work together based on the patient's health history. Our current LHIN system is very, very siloed. Now, "siloed" is something that's used a lot. I'd like to actually take one step further with it, with my own experiences with the LHIN. They're not necessarily silos; they're more like cylinders, because you can't get out of the cylinder, and that's the way the current system is set up.

Again, my friend from Niagara Centre was quite happy to talk about something from Sue VanderBent. He gave a quote from her about the system that we're trying to replace. But Sue has been involved in the consultation, and here's what she's now saying: "These changes will make the system work more efficiently, and ultimately will allow local health teams to better work together to keep people healthier at home." The NDP has used a quote from this person to say that the current system is broken, but they want to gloss over the fact that she's also come out and said what we're proposing will make the system better.

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Miranda Ferrier, the president of the Ontario Personal Support Workers Association, has also weighed in on this—and we recognize that there are a lot of PSWs who do not stay in the field, and that creates a challenge for us. But here's what Miranda said: "The proposed changes announced for home and community care in Ontario will provide personal support workers (PSW), patients and clients a new opportunity to work together to make Ontario health teams a success. Streamlining and modernizing the scheduling and funding process will offer Ontarians greater access to supports while also promoting continuity of care." Continuity of care is one of those things that we absolutely must have. "The OPSWA hopes that these changes will work to stabilize and modernize the PSW profession."

This is the president of the personal support workers association saying that she believes that the legislation that we're putting forward will provide more opportunities and a better work environment for personal support workers.

With this legislation, we know that the scheduling practices will be changed. We know that there will be more training opportunities for PSWs. These are things that we've heard from these stakeholders are barriers for people to stay in there. We know that we need a lot of PSWs. We know that we need nurses and nurse practitioners. You can have as great a plan as you want, but if you don't have the people on the front lines to carry out that work to care for our parents, to care for our grandparents, it's not going to work. And we have the president of the PSW association saying this is going to make things better for them.

I've only got a short period of time left. I want to talk just slightly about the LHINs and the LHIN process, and I'm going to share an example from a constituent in my riding. She's a medical professional. She's been working with the LHIN in her capacity for a number of years and knows some of the weaknesses and challenges that the LHIN has. Now she wants to come and meet with me about some challenges that she's personally having because she needs home care herself.

This is somebody who is in the system. This is someone who is a medical professional who has been working with the LHIN as a medical professional, and she is having challenges herself getting home care. If the professionals in the industry, the professionals who are working within the confines of that existing legislation, cannot navigate it, how can we expect the average person in Ontario to be able to do it? This is why we need to be modernizing it. This is why we need this bill to come forward, to be passed, and I implore our opposition members to please stand up and support this for the good of the people in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I listened intently to the member from Peterborough–Kawartha, and one of the comments that he made is that it's hard to retain the front-line workers, the PSWs, and I don't think that anybody would argue with that. Although the Conservatives may argue why it's hard to retain them, the reality is that these workers are underpaid and oftentimes underappreciated for the work they do. They are stretched to the limit with trying to provide care, because there aren't enough PSWs because of their work conditions and the wages and such.

So I'd like to ask the member for Peterborough–Kawartha: Does he think that it's fair and reasonable that the PSWs, the people who provide the front-line care, are not making a living wage? Does the member from Peterborough–Kawartha think that it's fair and reasonable that they are not being compensated fairly for the extra time that they're working? Does the member from Peterborough–Kawartha—and the government—believe that it is fair and reasonable that these workers often don't make enough to be able to care for themselves or their families by keeping a roof over their head or putting food on their own tables?

Mr. Dave Smith: I greatly appreciate the questions asked there. What feedback I have received from different PSWs as they have come in to me is that they have significant challenges in how their work is being scheduled. A number of them have said that they make enough money per hour; the problem that they have is that they're scheduled for two or three hours in the morning, and then they'll have a gap of a number of hours, and then they're scheduled for another couple of hours later on in the day. There isn't any consistency to it, and they're not able to find ways where they can condense it so that they actually have a workday that works for them as well. They talked a lot about some of those challenges that they have.

What this legislation is going to do is it's going to allow for changing that scheduling so that we don't find the large

gaps between, and we don't find the situation where we have a PSW who is only able to work two or three hours because of it. When you have consistent, steady work, that is something that's going to improve your life.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Ms. Donna Skelly: To my colleague from Peterborough–Kawartha: Throughout your discussion this afternoon, you mentioned the need to modernize our health care system. You also touched briefly on our government's plans to provide a more integrated system of health care. Can you tell us why this plan to provide a continuum of care to patients across Ontario is a much-valued and much-needed change in the delivery of health care in Ontario?

Mr. Dave Smith: What we see right now is that in hospitals, we'll have patients who have required hospital care. They have completed that. They're in a better position now. They no longer need care at the hospital. They end up staying in the hospital because we don't have a place for them to go to. There isn't home care readily available for them or there isn't long-term care readily available to them.

What we're trying to do with this bill is we're trying to fix some of that so that we do have that continuum of care, so that the patient receives the level of care where they need it, when they need it, so that you're not spending additional time in the hospital, away from your family. If you are in a position where you can receive your care at home, where you want to receive the care, we're in a better position to provide that care for you. We know that when you're in your home and you're happy, you live a much better life, and this will provide those opportunities for them.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Question?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: The member from Peterborough–Kawartha, in a previous response to something I asked, stated that PSWs were telling him or the government that they actually are making a good wage. Clearly, this shows how out of touch the government is, because all you have to do is talk to the front-line workers, talk to the unions that they belong to, and watch the videos where they're talking about how they have four minutes to care for people in long-term care and how they're talking about how they don't have enough time in home care to provide the compassionate care—not just care; compassionate care.

PSWs are coming to us—in my community, I'm hearing it all the time—about the fact that they cannot put food on their own tables. They cannot keep a roof over their own heads because many of them are making minimum wage. They're talking about how they're not being compensated for the extra time it takes for them to drive from one client to another.

So I'm going to ask the member from Peterborough–Kawartha again: Do you think that it is fair that the majority of the PSWs do not make a living wage?

Mr. Dave Smith: Again, I appreciate the question. I think that the question was conflating a number of different things. What we're doing is we're trying to change

some of the work conditions for those PSWs, to make sure that they have that steady, consistent work. Again, I have heard repeatedly that scheduling is one of the major challenges that they have, and that if we can address the scheduling—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much to the member from Peterborough–Kawartha, but it's now 6 o'clock.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Pursuant to standing order 36, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

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ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

RING OF FIRE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member for Kiiwetinoong has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Premier and/or his parliamentary assistant—or, in this case, the member from Peterborough–Kawartha, because unanimous consent has been given. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and in this case, the member from Peterborough–Kawartha may reply for up to five minutes.

I now turn it over to the member from Kiiwetinoong.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker. Good evening. I'm here this evening to ask the government once again about resource extraction in Treaty 9 territory as it relates to the Ring of Fire development.

Yesterday, I asked two questions of the government: (1) Can you tell me how ripping up previous agreements, then coming back to essentially the same agreements, is progress? (2) Community decisions don't happen at the speed of business. Keeping this in mind, how will Ontario make sure that First Nations who are not ready “to move at the speed of business” are heard and accommodated?

This was based on a troubling statement from the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines and of Indigenous relations that First Nations succeed and show leadership, according to the minister, only when they're prepared “to move at the speed of business.”

I am concerned about the answer given by the government on Monday, because communities adjacent to the Ring of Fire have been excluded from important inter-governmental leadership meetings on this project, which will have major impacts on their traditional territories. Two of these communities have said this publicly since Monday. Fort Albany First Nation stated that they had “been participating in good faith in the consultations related to the impact and environmental assessment processes for the Marten Falls and Webequie roads.” For them, the announcement on Monday raised “serious concerns about free, prior and informed consent, the transparency and integrity of the provincial environmental

assessment processes, and whether Ontario is meeting its duty to consult.”

My friend Chief Leo Metatawabin, who will be here shortly with me this evening—he’s actually right there—stated that “Ontario’s enthusiastic support for the northern road link without any meaningful dialogue at all with Fort Albany” made him “extremely concerned that Ontario is not approaching their duty to consult in good faith, and that any consultation with Fort Albany will simply be a rubber-stamp exercise.”

Chief Moonias of Neskantaga First Nation also warned the province that the northern road link into their territory will be met with “determined opposition” from the community. On Monday, Chief Moonias said, “You can expect opposition if Ontario, or any road proponent, tries to put a shovel in the ground of our territory without our consent.”

In a statement, Neskantaga said that the proposed road would divide its territory and cross the Attawapiskat River, which is the lifeblood of its culture and a way of life.

Chief Moonias called the Ring of Fire a symbol of Ford’s “jump on a dozer” agenda. He said that if the province wants to build a road, it will have to ensure “it doesn’t become another flashpoint in broader national clashes between governments and First Nations on free, prior and informed consent.”

The chief stated that he learned of Monday’s announcement in a last-minute phone call from the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines. Chief Metatawabin from Fort Albany, who is here, learned of the northern road link through a press release made by the Office of the Premier on Monday afternoon.

It appears to be a two-tiered system when it comes to consultation and relationship-building with First Nations in Ontario. I have spoken about this in the chamber multiple times—about the concept of free, prior and informed consent.

Basically, what these communities are telling you is that this new announcement has not been made in good faith and with all communities. This approach to consultation is unacceptable in this era and only leads to project delays. My friend Chief Metatawabin stated earlier this week: “Our people will not accept this. We will not consent to anything done with disregard for our inherent and treaty rights.” At this time, Ontario is choosing to respect two communities—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. We appreciate that.

Now I return to the member from Peterborough–Kawartha. You may respond for up to five minutes.

Mr. Dave Smith: The area currently referred to as the Ring of Fire region represents a major economic opportunity in Ontario’s broader mission to create jobs, attract investment, build infrastructure, and bring prosperity to communities across the north, including First Nations communities.

On Monday, Marten Falls First Nation and Webequie First Nation invited the Ontario government to join with

them to take a major step forward. This step forward is unlocking the opportunity by entering into an historic agreement to advance the planning and development of a proposed northern link.

The northern link road will connect the two communities’ access roads currently being studied, from the Webequie Supply Road to Marten Falls, and on to the provincial highway. But Mr. Speaker, this is more than just a road. This is a corridor to prosperity that will improve the quality of life for First Nation communities. It provides better access to economic opportunities, health care, education and housing supports.

The chief of Marten Falls confirmed this when he said, “We look forward to working together with Ontario to ensure the sustainable development of our ancestral territories.... Marten Falls First Nation takes seriously our right to make decisions for the betterment of our community. We are moving ahead with this agreement so all communities in the region can connect to the next phase, which is to secure and bring good-paying jobs in mining, construction, and other skilled trades to our communities.”

The chief of Webequie had this to say: “We have been working together with Ontario for many years to reach this point. We believe that road development will help bring prosperity to communities across the region and better infrastructure—both on- and off-reserve. We understand that road development will impact our traditional territories but believe this is a positive step to unlocking new opportunities that will benefit all surrounding” First Nations.

Mr. Speaker, our government remains firmly committed to creating economic and social development in the Far North. As a leading global jurisdiction in mineral exploration and production, Ontario’s mining industry supports 26,000 direct jobs and approximately 50,000 indirect jobs, with the Indigenous people making up 11% of that workforce. That places the mining industry as one of the largest employers of Indigenous people in Ontario.

All business cases point to the unprecedented opportunity that exists in the Ring of Fire region, but the opportunity means nothing without the infrastructure to get there. That’s why we’re moving forward with the development of the northern road link.

Mr. Speaker, we know that First Nation communities in this area face serious challenges, including shortages and issues with critical on-reserve infrastructure, such as housing and drinking water; wellness challenges such as mental health, above-average suicide rates, drug abuse; and other things that force the community to manage crises at the expense of long-term planning.

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Education, literacy and skills gaps mean that First Nations are not always able to take advantage of employment and economic development opportunities. That’s why we’re investing in partnerships on important projects in First Nations communities like this, like the Matawa broadband project—we’re investing \$30 million to benefit more than 670 homes and institutions with upgraded

broadband service—and like the Watay transmission project, by providing \$1.34 billion in financing to connect 1,400 First Nations community members to clean, reliable and affordable energy in Ontario. Mr. Speaker, we're moving forward with a historic moment in Ontario.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Niagara Falls has given notice of dissatisfaction with an answer to a question given by the Minister of Long-Term Care. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the parliamentary assistant, the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, may reply for up to five minutes.

And I would ask that we actually have order in the House so that I can hear both sides, please and thank you.

Now, I turn it over to the member from Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm here because I asked this government a question about the mental health crisis we have in Niagara. Frankly, their answer didn't show me they're taking the issue seriously.

I have a little bit more time here tonight, so I'd like to go over those numbers again. They're important and they must be heard. Mr. Speaker, every seven days—every seven days—in Niagara we lose a person to suicide: a mother, a father, a son, a daughter, a friend, a human being, a human being who feels they had nowhere else to turn, no one to talk to.

Upwards of 70% of the calls our first responders and police get are from people experiencing a mental health crisis. We have a hallway medicine crisis in Niagara. Doctors, nurses, front-line health care workers are trying their best, but they cannot devote the time necessary to help someone who needs that help right away. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, it's shameful that the government is forcing them to do this simply because they don't want to provide the funds—not that this government hasn't promised that funding for the people in Niagara. In December 2018, this government unanimously passed a motion given to us by front-line mental health workers in Niagara—supported by every member from Niagara, by the way: St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, Niagara Centre and Niagara West.

The motion put forward was a modest budget to create three 24-hour drop-in centres in St. Catharines, Welland and Niagara Falls—and quite frankly, the hospital in St. Catharines is in a PC riding—because right now if you need help, the services close at 9 p.m., when people are alone at night, and they have very few supports.

These centres would provide preventative care, crisis care and care for family members and friends of those helping loved ones with mental health issues.

Mr. Speaker, I said this the other day: Do you know what this program would have cost the budget? Do you know, Mr. Speaker? About 0.02% of the provincial budget—a drop in the bucket to save lives and help front-line workers.

It's not like we haven't done the groundwork on this. As the members of the opposition know, I am willing to work with them to make things happen in Niagara. I worked with the minister responsible for mental health and addictions, and I brought him to Niagara to hear from every front-line worker we could find. He knows the emergency, and he knows the request. And then they announced their mental health strategy and not one single dollar of that promised money is flowing to Niagara to fulfill their own promise.

Mr. Speaker, they misled the people of Niagara when they voted to pass that funding and they insulted—

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Hey, Speaker, that's not parliamentary.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please. I would ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I withdraw, sir.

They voted to pass that funding, and they insulted them further when they left them out of the mental health strategy announced yesterday.

So the minister is here today. I appreciate that. It goes back to my question yesterday that went unanswered. So now that I have control of the floor, I will ask again: After you promised that funding, after members from Niagara on your bench voted for that funding, and after you spoke with front-line workers and saw the crisis first-hand, why hasn't the funding come yet and why was it left out of the mental health strategy?

Mr. Speaker, how many more residents of Niagara must die due to mental health struggles before this government cares about Niagara?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Now the member from Eglinton–Lawrence may respond for up to five minutes.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member from Niagara Falls for raising this important issue.

Speaker, our government is listening. We heard from communities across the province, including communities in Niagara—which I visited myself with the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education—that mental health and addictions services have been inconsistent, under-resourced or simply not accessible to all Ontarians.

We heard loud and clear that the people of Ontario want their government to treat mental health with the same urgency as physical health, and that's why we made significant investments across the province to fill urgent gaps in our system. Our government has invested \$174 million this year to improve access to mental health and addictions care, including services in the Niagara region.

I will speak to some of those specific investments shortly, but first I want to assure members that we are making mental health and addictions a priority.

Yesterday, we launched our Roadmap to Wellness: A Plan to Build Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions System. Our government has undertaken extensive engagement with experts, grassroots organizations, health care providers on the front lines and first responders, as well as people who have experienced challenges with mental health and addictions, families and caregivers—and the member referenced some of those consultations.

The Minister of Health and the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions have been working hard to get this right. Our plan moves us in the right direction toward building a comprehensive and connected mental health and addictions system that works for all Ontarians. We will better support Ontarians in accessing high-quality services where and when they need them.

I know the member for Niagara Falls spoke to Bill 116, which was passed unanimously in December with the support of our colleagues across the aisle. That bill, the Foundations for Promoting and Protecting Mental Health and Addictions Services Act, 2019, was the enabling legislation for a new mental health and addictions centre of excellence.

The centre of excellence, which we have now formally established within Ontario Health, will serve as the foundation on which the Roadmap to Wellness will be built. It will enable and drive the effective implementation of the strategy's four pillars: improving quality, expanding existing services, implementing innovative solutions and improving access.

Under this cross-government plan, we will enhance the availability and quality of community-based mental health and addictions supports, and work to better connect Ontarians with these services. We're committed to investing \$3.8 billion in funding, split with the federal government, to implement the four pillars.

To serve the needs of Ontarians with mental health and addictions issues, we currently fund a spectrum of in-patient, community, residential and non-residential services across Ontario.

We believe that expanding community-based mental health and addictions services is important, because mental health is health. That's our objective. We think this

will help us alleviate hallway health care constraints as well.

Now let me just speak to Niagara, because I know the member opposite is concerned about availability in his community.

That is why, as part our \$174 million of funding to address urgent gaps in mental health and addictions, our government made significant investments in the Niagara region. We provided \$431,000 to the Niagara Health System for opioid addiction and treatment services. Pathstone Mental Health received \$182,500 for child and youth mental health services. We also provided \$102,000 to the regional municipality of Niagara for early psychosis intervention.

Our government invested \$122,000 in Hamilton Health Sciences' West Niagara Mental Health Program for addiction treatment and services. A further \$100,000 went to the CMHA Niagara addictions and withdrawal management for safe beds.

This funding is just the beginning of the \$3.8 billion in total funding over 10 years through our comprehensive mental health and addictions plan. We're committed to identifying and eliminating the various barriers to access services. I know the member opposite is advocating for a specific model as a solution to this problem. The government has listened to stakeholders, and that's why we have brought forward our Roadmap to Wellness.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I appreciate the professionalism that has been demonstrated by speakers on both sides.

There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.

This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1820.

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Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
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Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
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