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of Ontario



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(Hansard)**

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(Hansard)**

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Monday
14 September 2020

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Lundi
14 septembre 2020

Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Todd Decker

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 14 September 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 14 septembre 2020

The House met at 1015.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Good morning, and welcome back. We're going to begin this morning with a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Thank you very much. I wish to acknowledge this territory as a traditional gathering place for many Indigenous nations, most recently the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

This being the first sitting Monday of the month, we are now going to have O Canada and the royal anthem.

Playing of the national anthem / Écoute de l'hymne national.

Playing of the royal anthem / Écoute de l'hymne royal.
1020

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I neglected to do the Lord's Prayer. We'll do so now. Let us pray.

Prayers.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm seeking unanimous consent to move a motion without notice respecting distancing in the chamber, the use of electronic means of communication for meetings of standing and select committees and the voting procedure.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent of the House to move a motion regarding physical distancing and a number of other matters related to our response to COVID-19.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Speaker?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Our intention is to support this unanimous consent, but I just want to point out to the government House leader that there is a difference in part 37 in regard to the standing orders that are referred to—and we have, like, two seconds to figure out what that means. I would ask that the government House leader provide us with actual final copies in advance so that we can actually look at this and so that we don't have to delay anything in getting the business of the House done.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Does the government House leader wish to reply?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Not specifically. We will stand down for now and get back to it in a moment.

TABLING OF SESSIONAL PAPERS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that during the adjournment, the following documents were tabled:

—the 2019-20 annual report, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario;

—a report entitled Overview of Ontario's Borrowing Authority, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario;

—a report entitled Update on Ontario's Credit Rating, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario; and

—a report entitled Federal and Provincial COVID-19 Response Measures, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I also beg to inform the House that, pursuant to the order of the House dated July 15, 2020, establishing the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight, the Clerk of the House has received written notification from the House leaders of the recognized parties appointing the membership of the committee as follows: Mr. Bailey, Monsieur Bisson, Mr. Fraser, Ms. Hogarth, Mr. Kramp, Mrs. Martin, Mr. Oosterhoff, Ms. Park, Mr. Rakocevic, Ms. Singh, Brampton Centre, and Ms. Triantafilopoulos.

SOCIAL DISTANCING IN THE CHAMBER

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm seeking unanimous consent to move a motion without notice respecting distancing in the chamber, the use of electronic means of communication for the meeting of standing and select committees and the voting procedure.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion which he has described. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that for the duration of the fall sitting period and any extension thereof, members be permitted to speak and vote from any member's desk in the chamber in order to observe recommended physical distancing; and

That notwithstanding any standing order or special order of the House, for the duration of the 42nd Parliament, or until such earlier date as indicated by the government House Leader, all standing and select committees are authorized to use electronic means of communication when meeting, and committee members, witnesses, and/or staff are not required to be in one physical place, in accordance with the following guidelines:

(a) The electronic means of communication is approved by the Speaker;

(b) The meeting is held in a room in the Legislative Building, and at least the Chair/Acting Chair, and the Clerk of the Committee are physically present;

(c) Other members of the committee participating by electronic means of communication, whose identity and location within the province of Ontario have been verified by the Chair, are deemed to be present and included in quorum;

(d) The Chair shall ensure that the standing orders and regular committee practices are observed to the greatest extent possible, making adjustments to committee procedures only where necessary to facilitate the physical distancing and electronic participation of members, witnesses and staff; and

That in order to practise appropriate physical distancing during recorded divisions, standing orders 30(c), 32(b) and 37 shall be suspended for the duration of the 42nd Parliament, or until such earlier date is indicated by the government House leader, and the following substituted:

“30(c) When a recorded division is required, members shall proceed to the members’ lobbies to register their vote with the Clerks. The ayes shall be recorded in the east members’ lobby and the nays shall be recorded in the west members’ lobby. Subject to standing order 13, every member shall have their vote recorded in this manner.

“(c.1) Thirty minutes shall be allotted to the conduct of each vote, during which time the division bell shall ring, and after which time no further votes shall be recorded.

“(c.2) The whips of the recognized parties, or their designates, may attend the members’ lobbies to observe the taking of the vote, and copies of the Clerks’ tally sheets shall be made available to each whip as soon as possible after the vote.

“(c.3) For each vote held under this proceeding during the afternoon routine, 30 minutes shall be added to the end of the afternoon orders of the day, unless the government House leader indicates otherwise....

“32(b) Excluding the time taken to conduct recorded votes as determined by standing order 30(c.3), the time allotted for the afternoon routine each day shall not exceed 90 minutes. At the end of that time, the Speaker shall interrupt and shall put every question necessary to dispose of the proceeding currently occupying the House, and thereafter immediately call orders of the day....

“37 Any divisions deferred under the standing orders shall be disposed of consecutively, and notwithstanding standing order 30(c.1), where there is more than one deferred vote, only 15 minutes shall be allotted to subsequent deferred votes after the first vote.

“37.1 If deferred votes continues past 1 p.m. on Monday or Thursday or past 3 p.m. on Tuesday or Wednesday, the Speaker shall immediately call reports by committees once all deferred votes have been taken.”

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader has moved that for the duration of the fall sitting period and any extension thereof, members be permitted to speak and vote from any member’s desk in

the chamber in order to observe recommended physical distancing—

Interjection: Dispense?

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

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS’ STATEMENTS

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I can tell you that all of us here in this assembly have been running across the same problem when it comes to access to Internet. It doesn’t matter if you’re an urban member or a rural member, accessing high-speed Internet for many people across Ontario is virtually impossible. We’ve been getting phone calls, as you have on the other side of the House, because the children have had to stay home and learn by way of the Internet last spring, and there are going to be some of them doing the same thing again. You have parents that are working at home and they do not have access to the Internet. In places like Connaught, Barbers Bay, Kamiskotia in my own community—and it would be the same across Ontario—you have a real problem making sure that people have access to good broadband Internet.

Now, the government has made announcements that they’ve got some funding coming, but they keep on announcing the same money over and over again. We don’t see any new towers going up and any remarkable change when it comes to service. So I’m making this following proposition to the government: Why don’t we work together in order to make sure that we’re able to put together a system that makes some sense to be able to make sure that, if you live in northern Ontario or downtown Toronto or Ottawa or Timmins or wherever it might be, that you can have access to cheap, affordable broadband Internet, because today the Internet is important when it comes to being able to do what we do on a daily basis?

1030

We here are prepared to work with you. We’re asking you to work with us in order to serve the people of Ontario, who we were all elected here to represent. Let’s get this problem fixed, because it is a real problem across this province.

ANNIVERSARY OF 9/11

Mr. Roman Baber: Last Friday, our friends south of the border and people across the world marked the 19th anniversary of the September 11 attacks. Motivated by evil ideology, September 11 shook all of us to the core.

Folks like to say that they remember exactly where they were when the first plane hit the north tower. Sure, I remember, but where we were matters less. What really mattered in those 60 to 80 critical minutes is where New York’s first responders were: the men and women of the

New York and New Jersey police departments, New York and New Jersey fire, New York paramedics and port authority folks—ordinary people who ran into burning towers, into chaos, into an incredible risk, and evacuated and saved thousands of people.

They did it not just because they're heroes; they did it because it's their job. They did it because that is the sacrifice that we ask police, firefighters and paramedics to make for our loved ones, for our friends—for all of us. All together, 343 firefighters, 50 police officers and a dozen paramedics died inside or at the foot of those magnificent towers. Hundreds more got sick.

God bless our police, fire and EMS for keeping us safe, for running into danger when everyone else runs from it, and for serving us every day, not knowing if they will come home. We owe police, fire and EMS a debt of gratitude. God bless them and God bless the memory of all those who perished.

STUDENT SAFETY

Ms. Jennifer K. French: As everyone has said, we have been hearing from parents across the community. I have some letters. This one is from Richard Campbell of Whitby, who wrote to this government:

“As you know, the people of Durham region and Ontario have worked very hard to make many sacrifices that flattened the curve and continue to reduce and eliminate the prevalence of the COVID-19 virus in our communities. It is critical for students, families, staff and our economy that we do not erase the progress we have made because of your ministry's plan to reopen schools.

“Without additional measures, you are risking a second closure of schools, businesses and our economy, along with the individual social and financial impacts that would come with it....

“The health and safety of students and staff should be the top priority.

“As parents of elementary-aged children, we feel as though we must do everything that we can to ensure that students, parents/guardians and staff do not have to worry about the return to school. We urge you to do the same.” That's from Richard in Whitby.

Kristy Micklewright writes:

“My concern comes from the obvious divide in approaches between elementary and secondary grades. It appears that the elementary grades are returning to business as usual and secondary grades are putting some sort of measures in place to socially distance....

“It leaves me feeling concern for the elementary teachers and students. And also leaves me seeing how our elementary teachers are being used primarily as a daycare substitute and their role as educators is being put to second place....

“Please re-evaluate the elementary return-to-school protocols. Put more measures in place to allow for social distancing and small cohorts.”

Justin Hines is asking this government to “do right by the children of Ontario and make up for the shameful lack of planning....”

We hope that the government will hear these voices and those from across the province, reverse course, and do right by the children of Ontario.

ANN KEELEY-MELOCHE

Mr. Will Bouma: I stand here today to posthumously recognize a long-serving and dedicated community worker in Brantford-Brant.

Ann Keeley-Meloche supported the Navy League and Sea Cadet programs in our community as well as in neighbouring Woodstock and Kitchener for over 25 years. She also served as a provincial coordinator of training for the Sea Cadets and director at the provincial level for the Navy League Cadets. Through her tireless work in the cadet programs, she kept hundreds of youth off the streets and out of trouble.

Ann was also nominated for several awards and recognitions, but sadly, she passed away on August 20 of this year.

I spoke to a cadet parent recently and he told me that his son, who is aging out of Navy League Cadets and had no intention of continuing, decided to go and join the Sea Cadets “for Mrs. Meloche.” I am most impressed with a person who, even in death, is inspiring the youth of Brantford-Brant-Six Nations into community service, excellence, mentoring younger cadets and being the best that they can be.

Last June, I hosted the top cadets from my riding right here in the Legislature, and Ann accompanied them. She was absolutely beaming with pride for the eight cadets and commanding officers, for their hard work and dedication to our community.

On behalf of a grateful community that Ann has served so faithfully and, indeed, the entire province of Ontario: She will be dearly missed.

GRAPE AND WINE INDUSTRY

Mr. Wayne Gates: Today I'd like to speak about one of the most important and treasured aspects of my riding in Niagara: the grape and wine industry. I always tell people that I have the privilege of representing one of the best ridings in all of Ontario, and the wine industry is a big part of that.

For decades, we've witnessed the industry in Niagara grow into one of the most prized wine regions in North America. However, just like other industries in our province, the grape and wine industry is facing an uncertain future. COVID-19 has had a serious, negative impact on our small and medium-sized wineries and our grape growers. With restaurants closed and limited shelf space for our local wines at the LCBO stores, the industry has some serious concerns.

Not only does the industry produce some of the most beautiful wines in the world, but it also generates jobs and economic activity. Ontario produces 60% to 70% of all grapes in Canada, with 93% coming from the Niagara region. The wine industry has a \$4.4-billion economic

impact on the province of Ontario. I believe it's time we listen to this important industry and ensure that they have a bright future ahead.

Right now, Ontario wineries are paying a 6.1% tax on retail sales, a tax that is not paid by the foreign competition you see at the LCBO. It makes absolutely no sense. The Conservative government, today, needs to step up with support for the grape and wine industry so we can protect jobs, grow the economy and ensure the future of our great Niagara wines, which I'm sure all my colleagues have drunk more than once.

DAVE SMITH

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to say a few words in honour of my friend Dave Smith, who recently passed at the age of 87. Born in Ottawa to Russian immigrants Louie and Annie Smith, Dave was the youngest of 13 children. Dave's roots gave him a strong work ethic, and he built a successful restaurant and catering business in Ottawa—you may be familiar with Nate's and the Place Next Door.

Dave's other passion were his charitable pursuits. Over his lifetime he raised more than \$150 million for dozens of organizations in Canada and around the world. He took special interest in youth addictions and mental health supports. That's how I first met Dave. Because of Dave's leadership, we were able to work collaboratively with a number of organizations to build residential beds at the Dave Smith Youth Treatment Centre and initiate Ottawa's Project Step program, helping young people struggling with substance abuse and mental health issues. The centre is a testament to his compassion and desire to help.

Dave understood the meaning of community. You could always count on him. Most importantly, Dave was generous, kind, enthusiastic and a great friend to everyone he knew. We laid Dave to rest on Labour Day, which was fitting because of his lifetime of tireless efforts.

To Darlene, Dave's wife of 35 years; his daughter, Sharron Anne; his granddaughter, Kristy; and his many, many, many friends: Dave left an incredible legacy which will live on.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Stan Cho: I'm honoured to rise in the House today to take a moment and remember a friend who, in August, at the age of 35, died of suicide.

Over the last six months, COVID-19 has changed our lives. As we continue to battle this global health pandemic together, it's important to recognize its effect on our mental health and the toll this new normal we must endure can take. Speaker, I've heard from many friends, family and constituents that they are struggling with loneliness, depression and added levels of stress. While working from home, they've found it hard to maintain a healthy work/life balance. While social distancing, they've found it difficult to be with the ones they need the most.

Last Thursday was World Suicide Prevention Day, a day to raise awareness that suicide can be prevented. I rise

today to remind Ontarians to raise awareness every day; to check in with the colleagues you haven't seen in months; to express gratitude to our front-line workers working tirelessly away from family and friends; and to lend an ear to a friend who's struggling, stressed or feeling alone.

Asking for help can be hard, but if you or someone you know needs help, please call the 24/7 crisis services line at 1-833-456-4566 and find resources on connexontario.ca.

1040

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: After months of waiting in pain and discomfort, residents of Nickel Belt and Sudbury were really excited: Health Sciences North had started doing surgeries. Appointments were booked, plans were made, and then—nothing. Last week, every single elective surgery at Health Sciences North was cancelled. Why were they cancelled? Because the hospital was once again at over 100% capacity.

While the rest of the province has over 4,500 empty hospital beds, in Sudbury our hospital is full, and over 30 people sick enough to be admitted into the hospital were in hallways, bathrooms or in the hospital basement. This government knows that our hospital is too small. They know that we do not have options for long-term care and that our home care system cannot recruit and retain a stable workforce.

My constituent, Mr. Ron Bradley has been told he needs eye surgery, but it will be over one year before he can get it, unless he's willing to travel down south. Mr. Bradley is a senior. He needs eye surgery now. Travelling to the GTA is too dangerous for him.

When will the Ontario government start to look at equitable access to health care in this province? These issues did not pop up overnight. They are long-term problems that this government is not interested in fixing—it's not politically expedient. But, Speaker, every Ontarian deserves equitable access to care, and that includes Ron Bradley and everyone else in Nickel Belt.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'd like to recognize the work that the government is doing to create jobs and promote a safe and stable business environment.

In the month of August, Ontario has seen its employment increase by approximately 142,000 jobs. This is the third straight month of employment increases, which speaks to the incredible work the government is doing in partnership with hard-working Ontario families and local businesses.

Speaking of partnerships, Amazon announced late last week that they will build a one-million-square-foot distribution facility, creating 1,000 new jobs, in the town of Ajax, and a 354,000-square-foot facility in the town of Whitby, with hundreds of full-time jobs. That's a solid investment in an area known for its strength and resiliency, where innovation transforms lives. More importantly, this

great news is a direct reflection of the collaboration that exists between Durham region's economic development team, the local area municipalities and the Ontario government.

The new Amazon facilities are just one more example of how Ontario is still one of the best places in the world to do business.

KEIRA KAGAN

Mrs. Gila Martow: On August 14, my office staff attended a memorial at the Bialik day school, just north of my riding of Thornhill, to remember and honour the sweet and bright Keira Kagan whose young life was tragically taken on February 9 as a result of a difficult family situation. As part of the memorial, friends, family and community members shared their fond memories of the short but meaningful time they spent with Keira.

To commemorate her life, Bialik unveiled a white friendship bench with a rainbow on it, because little Keira loved rainbows. The bench was chosen to represent the warmth Keira brought to other students each and every day. Adorning the entranceway to her classroom, a colourful rainbow-adorned mezuzah was also placed so that she would always be part of her classroom. Though she was only four years old, this little girl left a big impact on many people's lives, including teachers, family and friends.

Dr. Jennifer Kagan is Keira's mother. Since the tragic incident in February, she's been advocating for changes to our Family Court and law system, not just for her but also for "thousands of parents who are engaged in child custody litigation with abusive ex-partners." As Jennifer put it in a letter to me, "We need to do better for our children."

APPOINTMENT OF CLERKS-AT-THE-TABLE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Before I ask for oral questions, I want to bring the attention of members of the House to the appointment of Peter Sibenik and William Wong as Clerks-at-the-Table. A lot of you will know Peter and William for their work as co-counsel in the office of parliamentary counsel, and from occasional professional development assignments here in the House at the table.

As table officers, they will serve the members in a permanent capacity and assist the Clerk and Deputy Clerk in providing procedural advice to the Speaker and to members.

I know that all members will join me in congratulating Mr. Sibenik and Mr. Wong as they assume their new responsibilities.

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): As I have done on several previous occasions, I wish to address the House on the participation of independent members. On July 19, 2018, I advised the House how I was going to arrange for the independent members to participate in debates on

motions for second and third reading of government bills and on substantive government motions. At that time, I took a strictly mathematical approach to ensure that independent members would have an opportunity to speak in these debates proportional to what any other member of the House would normally have. I decided that each member would have three minutes in those debates, and I further agreed to aggregate the time for the Liberal independent members, giving them a 20-minute speaking time so that they were able to share and split among other Liberal members.

On October 28, 2019, as a result of vacancies in the House in the ridings of Ottawa–Vanier and Orléans, I informed the House that the time available to the remaining Liberal independent members during debate on second or third reading of government bills or on a substantive government motion would be reduced to 15 minutes.

In May of this year, following by-elections in those ridings, which the Liberals retained, the 20-minute allotment was restored. The Liberal independent group is now currently eight members, and based on the three-minute formula that group is entitled to 24 minutes. They now have formally requested that they be given this full allotment. It is a reasonable request and consistent with the rationale behind my earlier decisions.

Setting aside certain standing order exemptions that do not apply to the Liberal group, members may not speak for more than 20 minutes. It is therefore not possible to give a 24-minute speaking slot. Instead, I will divide the allotment into two 12-minute slots. As before, if speaking times have reduced to 10 minutes under standing order 26(c), then the operation of that rule applies and the speaking time will be 10 minutes, not 12.

I want to thank: the member for Ottawa South for raising this matter and requesting my direction; the Clerk, Deputy Clerk and table staff for their continued support and advice to all the members in this House; and I thank the House for its attention during my statement.

QUESTION PERIOD

SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question is to the Premier. Across Ontario, parents are nervously watching COVID case numbers increase, and in fact, as I was coming into the House this morning I was informed that those numbers are now over 300, at 313, and so parents are, of course, very nervous as they prepare to send their kids back to school.

Thousands of those students, Speaker, learned just over this past week, that their school bus was cancelled, most often because school bus drivers actually fear for their own safety, and the safety of the kids.

Earlier this summer, the Premier of this province said that he was sparing nothing when it comes to the safe return to school. When will he live up to that, Speaker?

When will he live up to that, and provide the money necessary to keep our kids safe?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply on behalf of the government, the Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the question. Mr. Speaker, as uncles and aunts and moms and dads and grandparents across the province, we are all committed to the safety of our kids. Our plan that has been unveiled has been fully supported by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, it is fully funded and is evidence-informed.

What I can say is that, as we faced unprecedented challenge in this province, I am proud of our people, who have responded with a strong resolve to work together to flatten this curve and allow our kids to remain learning in schools. Our plan of \$1.3 billion of investment flowing to the school boards has enabled smaller classroom sizes, robust testing in our schools and a screening apparatus before they enter the school. It is also supported by the hiring of more support staff and more custodians, and more cleaning and improvements to ventilation.

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We know what is at stake. We will do everything possible, including more resources and more investments, to keep all students and all staff safe in the province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, experts at the Hospital for Sick Children—and even the government's own experts—have said that students should maintain a two-metre distance from each other. Given that, can the Premier tell us how many students he feels should be seated on a school bus with 24 seats?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Our government unveiled net investments for student transportation because we know how important it is for moms and dads to have their children get to school safely every single day. That's the basis for why we have invested an additional \$40 million for the driver retention program. This helps to incent more bus drivers in our schools. It also ensures, by providing PPE to all bus drivers, that we're keeping them safe. We've added \$25 million to route protection and an additional \$30 million to ensure that they're safe and that they're clean. We've done everything possible to ensure assigned seating on our buses, to ensure a lower quantum on them, and more importantly, that they are constantly cleaned throughout the day.

We will continue to support our drivers, our schools and our parents as we get through this unprecedented challenge.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Last week, a woman named Angela, a driver from Durham, reached out to our office with the same concerns that parents have been expressing. A copy of her route that she provided to us showed 68 children on a single bus at once—68 children on one

24-seat bus. That is three kids per seat on a standard school bus, Speaker.

How can Ontario's children and the school bus drivers expect to stay safe in these cramped conditions? It doesn't make any sense. Perhaps the Premier can tell us exactly how those folks are going stay safe.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: How our buses are going to remain safe is by ensuring that they are constantly cleaned, which is why we've invested an additional \$40 million so that our operators, our consortia and our school boards have the financial latitude to ensure that they're constantly cleaned and that those high-contact places are cleaned often. More importantly, PPE and masking are required on our buses, like in schools. A full suite of PPE is provided to our workers, to our bus drivers, and likewise training for them.

We have put in more funding for route protection because in this province, like in all provinces, for well over a decade we have faced a driver shortage that I know all members in this House are cognizant of. It's precedes our election, but, nonetheless, it is our priority to make sure that we retain that talent and that we have committed workers who are going to get our kids to school every day single day.

SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier, but I have to say, I'm pretty shocked, because if there was a driver shortage before, it is getting worse now because this government has not invested properly in the hiring of more bus drivers and the provision of more buses for school boards to be able to safely distance our kids and keep those drivers safe.

In fact, we did hear from another driver—his name is William—from Hamilton who drove a bus for students with special needs. William was forced out of his job due to health concerns for himself and his family. Across the province, drivers like William are making similar choices. Over the last three days, thousands of students learned that their school bus routes have literally been cancelled.

How can the Premier tell the parents of this province that he spared no expense when bus drivers across Ontario are walking away from the job because they are afraid of the lack of protections for themselves and their kids because the Premier won't spend the money to keep them or their passengers safe? How can he tell parents that he spared no expense?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: In the context of our investment to ensure our schools, our playgrounds and our buses are safe, we've invested over \$70 million, partially to restore or renew the driver retention program. What that does, Speaker, is it ensures that some incremental dollars flow to our workers, who are often older, who work very hard and are fully committed to our kids. By doing that, we help retain them.

We recognize that this pandemic may have exacerbated an issue that governments in this province and this country

have faced for well over a decade. That is a reality in the labour market. But what we can do on our levels, within our authorities, is ensure that the driver retention program remains. We can ensure that enhanced cleaning is provided in our buses. We can ensure assigned seating and masking to protect the students and very much protecting the staff members who drive them.

We are committed to ensuring that funding continues to flow. In fact, just weeks ago, we announced another \$25 million on route protection. We will do everything we can, working with our school boards to ensure that kids can safely get to school each and every day.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, with all due respect, if the government knew this was a problem for a decade, they should have been prepared and fixed it so that kids could get to school safely and bus drivers could work safely.

So the Premier knows—that's what I just heard—what parents and school boards and school bus drivers have been sounding the alarm bells on for some time now. For weeks, they have been sounding the alarm bell that this was going to be a problem, but apparently the government wasn't listening.

Debbie Montgomery is a school bus driver who has been speaking out for weeks about the government's failure to protect students on school buses. She says, "Action is urgently needed to protect students and school bus drivers across the province..." She says that drivers are ready to work with school boards and health experts to develop standardized health and safety pandemic protocols on passenger limits, social distancing, mask requirements, bus sanitization procedures and personal protective equipment use.

Will the Premier listen to Debbie? Will this government step up to the plate and protect our kids and the school bus drivers?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Speaker, I was very pleased to meet with school bus drivers last week, as well as the head of the school bus driver association of Ontario, where she had affirmed her gratitude to the province for our investment, knowing that it's going to make a difference—an unprecedented investment in transportation, because we realize, Speaker, that a challenge that extends beyond our provincial border has long been a challenge for government. That's why we've put monies in place immediately through this pandemic to backstop and to ensure we retain those bus drivers.

The extension of the driver retention program will help incentivize workers to stay. We are providing full PPE, full training for them and likewise mandating, like in our schools, the same program and same requirement of masking of our kids—assigned seating to strengthen the contact management protocols, whenever a challenge arises.

Speaker, we recognize there is a challenge. We are all working together—our school boards, consortia and parents—and understanding that in this pandemic we will face challenges. How we get through this is by working

together, ensuring those dollars flow to our front lines and, Mr. Speaker, this Premier and this government will continue to do just that.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Between the lack of adequate physical distancing and the lack of streamlined protocols to sanitization, it is abundantly clear—abundantly clear—that the Premier's school bus plan for students and drivers was in fact no plan at all. Will the Premier now, then—since we're in this crisis at this moment—provide for the funding and the directive to cap all school buses at 50% capacity?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, what the government has done is provide an unprecedented amount of funding to our school boards, school bus drivers and consortia to ensure that we can do three things:

(1) We can ensure that they're cleaned more often, more regularly and more intensively than ever before.

(2) That we can reduce the amount of children on those buses.

(3) That we could ensure that our masking protocol is the most comprehensive in this country.

We have done all of that, following the Chief Medical Officer of Health. In fact, Dr. Cohn, the president of SickKids, who was mentioned in an earlier question, has said that it's critical to understand that not one single measure is going to help mitigate the risk, we need to put a lot of these measures in place in order to mitigate the risk as much as possible.

We have a comprehensive plan, with masking, with cleaning, with screening, Speaker, as well as the hiring of more than 625 public health nurses. In each and every area in this country, we lead. In fact, when you compare provincial investment in British Columbia and the New Democratic government, we are spending twice the rate as the NDP in BC. We are fully committed to our students, and we are going to continue to demonstrate to parents in this province that we'll do whatever it takes to keep them safe.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is also for the Premier. For a lot of parents this has been a very anxious weekend, with COVID-19 cases on the rise again and serious concerns across Ontario about the government's school readiness plan.

Last week, we saw hundreds of students in Ottawa kept home, and according to the government's own data-reporting site, today we have 15 new cases in schools. I'm hearing from parents in all corners of this province who are alarmed that their children will be in classes as large as 30.

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Speaker, through you to the Premier: Why has the government refused to fund the smaller, safer classrooms needed to keep our students safely distanced?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, this province and government have invested \$1.3 billion in monies to flow to respond to this challenge and to ensure that our kids and our staff remain safe.

In the context of classroom sizes, in the Toronto District School Board, where the member hails from, for context, in the more intensively staffed schools and those communities with high risk, in kindergarten to grade 3, they're capped at 15 students. From grades 4 to 8, they're capped at 20 students.

In every region of this province, we are seeing net reductions in classroom size. We are seeing more distancing. We are seeing over 2,000 teachers being hired, according to estimates by the ministry. We are seeing more custodians being hired, more public health nurses. We had 460 public health nurses in this province dedicated to schools. Under this government's leadership, more than 517 were hired as of today, and we are on track to hire 625—more than doubling the capacity of those medical practitioners in our schools.

In every realm, we lead. We will continue to be responsive to the risk and to take further action to ensure all students are safe in this province.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'll point out to the minister that the TDSB dug into their own reserves to bring some of those schools to 15 students. Why won't you give the same thing to the rest of the students in this province?

The minister says that more funding for school preparedness is going to be available on an as-needed basis, but with families in Peel region and elsewhere pulling their children out of class by the thousands this weekend, it's more clear than ever that funding is needed now, not weeks or months from now.

Parents, employers and communities don't want to wait and see who gets sick, and hope for the best. They want the government to do everything possible right now to prevent the spread of COVID-19 before it's too late. Will the government finally treat this with the seriousness it deserves and flow the money needed to ensure smaller classes, safer buses and more student supports across this province?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll ask all the members to make their remarks through the chair.

The Minister of Education to reply.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

Let me affirm to this House what we are doing. Some 37 million pieces of PPE have been delivered to schools for the month of September, thanks to the leadership of Minister Thompson, ensuring that we have a supply chain that continues to flow the products that we need to keep them safe. As of today, 517 more public health nurses have been hired, more than doubling the capacity of public health nurses within our schools. Over 1,300 custodians

are expected to be hired through this process, and more over the coming weeks. Over 2,500 educators are expected to be hired as a consequence of our aim to reduce classroom size and maximize distancing. And we are the only province—and proudly—to have an asymptomatic testing regime that will focus on those higher-risk communities. We have unveiled \$1.3 billion in funding available.

To correct the member opposite, it's not just Toronto district Catholic and public school boards that have reduced classroom sizes. In every single school board, they have taken action, provided for by funding from the province, supported by the reserve funding and supported by the federal funding. We are all doing our part to ensure that classroom sizes could be reduced and, ultimately, our schools can be safe.

STUDENT SAFETY

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: My question is to the Minister of Education. Speaker, over the summer, I heard from parents, students and teachers how important it was to them to return to school in September. Students missed their friends and getting the education that they deserve. Of course, safety is top of mind for them, and safety is top of mind for our government, too.

My three eldest kids were excited to be back in class with their teachers and friends. I'm proud that our government released a nation-leading plan, with the investments to back it up, to ensure our reopening of schools is done in a safe and fully funded way.

Can the Minister of Education please tell this Legislature how our government is ensuring a safe reopening of schools?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member for his question and for his advocacy not just as a parent, but as an effective member from Peel, working so hard to ensure that their voices are heard.

Speaker, the voices of parents, of students, of educators—everyone within our system—are being acted upon to ensure that our schools are safe. It is the reason why the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the foremost medical authority of this province, who has ably advised our cabinet and our province on how to get through this pandemic, has given his stamp of approval.

The reason why he has done so is because we've introduced layers of protections which uniquely differentiate our province in this country: the fact that we have public health nurses being doubled; the fact that we are hiring more custodians and cleaning staff; the fact that we have an asymptomatic testing program; the fact that in this province, we are ensuring that all school boards have additional funding—\$1.3 billion in additional funding—for a one-year investment, a one-time investment, to do everything we can to keep our kids safe. That's our commitment. That's what we'll continue to do.

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

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: I want to thank the minister for his answer and just say again how happy I am to hear our

government has such a strong plan in place to keep our children safe as they return to school. I'm sure all of us are aware how eager students were to get back to school and see their classmates.

It's no secret that the Minister of Health has been working tirelessly over the last six months to ensure that our province can safely reopen. As our children return to schools and their parents return to work, I know our government is committed to taking every precaution necessary to protect their health and well-being. Can the Minister of Health please tell this House how our government plans to continue to protect Ontarians as we move forward with this next stage?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville for his question and his advocacy. The progress that we've made so far has only been possible because Ontarians have demonstrated incredible resolve. But we can't stop there, especially as our students are returning to school and to post-secondary institutions.

That's why we've taken a pause of four weeks, or two incubation periods, before considering any further loosening of public health measures or any further openings of businesses, to make sure that we avoid returning to broad-scale shutdowns and returning back to stage 2. No one wants to have to do that.

But it remains critical that everyone continues to act on the public health measures that we've been emphasizing for many months. This includes everyday measures like proper hand hygiene, social distancing and, of course, wearing a mask in situations where that's not possible. These actions will help to keep everyone safe so that we can, after this four-week period is over, hopefully be able to start loosening our restrictions once again.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, we all know that businesses are struggling. In Waterloo, 15 businesses have closed—11 directly due to the effects of COVID-19. Our main streets are hurting in Ontario. The finance committee heard from businesses all summer. Businesses facing eviction and increased rents—but they still came to the committee, they took the time to bring solutions to us. The problem is that this government is not listening. They've heard that businesses need a functioning rent relief program, yet they've done nothing. They've heard that the provincial tax deferrals need to turn into grants, yet they've done nothing.

The province cannot afford to see its main streets hollowed out. Will the Premier listen to what these struggling businesses are saying and come to the table with meaningful, financial, direct support for businesses in the province of Ontario?

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

Hon. Rod Phillips: I thank the member for the question. I'd like to thank, as well, the committee: over 80

hours of testimony, over 200 witnesses—a great deal of work done by members across the aisle.

Back in March, our government announced our action plan of \$17 billion of support. Since that, in August, with the update that was provided in the quarterly update, that amount of support has gone to \$30 billion. Of course, an important element of that support is directed exactly at the businesses that the member references: \$57 million in partnership with the federal government with regard to the Digital Main Street program, and \$175 million for support in terms of electricity rates.

This government will continue to listen, just as it has through the committee, and it will continue to make a difference for businesses on main streets in Ontario.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Money spent saving businesses now will pay off in the long term. This government should consider these as investments in our economic recovery, especially if we face a second wave.

The Ontario BIA Association came to the finance committee with practical recommendations to support their 110,000 member businesses. They need the insurance sector to honour their business interruption insurance and not raise rates. They need direct rent relief to commercial tenants. They need caps on commercial rent. They need an extension on eviction protection. They need clear and consistent communication moving forward. These 110,000 members expect a partner in the recovery in this province.

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It's clear that lessons can be learned from the first wave, but the work needs to be done now. For many small businesses, it's too late. Is this government actually going to step up and fight for our local businesses and offer real support for these important factors in our economy?

Hon. Rod Phillips: That is exactly what this government has been doing, fighting for small business, just like it was fighting for small business, frankly, before the pandemic. It's great to see a colleague across the aisle now taking an interest in business.

We talked about rent programs; 47,000 tenants representing almost 500,000 employees have taken advantage of the rent support program. The program to suspend evictions has been extended. Again, the SCOFEA committee did a historic level of consultation. They listened—and this was, I must say, an action taken on both sides of the House—and we very much respect that feedback.

A \$30-billion program has been put in place to support Ontarians, including Ontario's businesses. We will continue to support those businesses. We will continue to make sure that that backbone of the Canadian economy and the Ontario economy stays in place.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier. To say it has been a chaotic and uncertain start to the school year would be an understatement. All schools aren't open

yet, and we're already seeing hundreds of students and their educators being isolated in places like Ottawa, my hometown. Classes are being collapsed and are getting larger instead of smaller. There are empty classrooms all across this province, and every day the case counts are rising.

Speaker, it didn't have to be this way. The Premier refuses to acknowledge that the single most important thing we can do to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 in our schools and in our communities is classes that are smaller and safer. Speaker, through you, why is it that the Premier will not commit to making every child's classroom smaller and safer?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: This government has delivered over \$200 million to school boards to reduce classroom sizes province-wide. Every school board, English and French, public and Catholic—every single school board has taken action to reduce the risk and to maximize distancing. In Ottawa-Carleton, for example, that board is now enabled with an additional \$33 million more to respond to COVID-19. In that community, they have hired 45 more public health nurses dedicated squarely to our students. And yes, indeed, in Ottawa Catholic and public, they have reduced classroom sizes.

We are fully committed to the full layers of protection, ensuring that, yes, we maximize distancing, but also ensuring that we have masking in place, additional cleaning of our schools, testing of our students, screening before they're entering, cohorting of the kids to make sure that we maintain and limit the amount of spread within our schools. In every single realm, we lead in this country, knowing that as the risk evolves, we'll be there for our kids and for our schools.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Actually, the number that counts, and I've been hearing numbers all morning, is how many children you can put in a classroom and effectively reduce the spread of COVID-19. That's the number. That's the number you should be driving towards.

For months, parents, teachers, educators, principals, trustees and public health experts have all been asking you to make class sizes smaller. What is so hard about that? Why can't that happen? In the last month, the federal government has given three quarters of a billion dollars—three quarters of a billion dollars—to help Ontario schools. You're not using that money. In fact, you're holding some of that money back. What's with that? How do you explain that to parents? It's hard for them to understand that. I don't understand that. Maybe you do. So, Speaker, through you, why does the Premier refuse to make every child's class smaller and safer?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Again, I'll ask the members to make their comments through the Chair at all times.

Minister of Education to reply.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We have ensured that funding from the province, supported by reserve funding by the

boards and now federal funding, all of which is supporting the safety of our schools—the single largest fiscal investment in school safety in this nation by any standard, \$1.3 billion more to ensure that every single school is safe.

Speaker, just so we're clear, the member opposite asked why we are holding back \$380 million in federal funding. I'll alert the member, who is from Ottawa, that the federal government has apportioned \$380 million effective September 1 and is holding the next \$381 million until January 1. I'd ask the member opposite to stand with us—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'd ask the member opposite to join us, constructively, and I mean that, to urge the federal government to deliver more flexibility for those dollars and to expedite them, given the need in our schools and the risk in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, we'll continue to ensure all these layers of prevention are in place, that we reduce classroom sizes, that we ensure ventilation is improved and that ultimately—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. I say to the members, even if you're wearing a mask, I can still recognize your voices.

The next question.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Mr. Toby Barrett: We have a beautiful and varied natural environment here in Ontario. Lakes and rivers dot the landscape, from lowlands in the south to boreal forest and the Canadian Shield in the north. Our province is home to many fish and wildlife species that make our ecosystems unique, provide plenty of recreational opportunities for families and support business and tourism across the province.

Of course, we want to ensure that our fish and wildlife remain healthy and abundant—a difficult task that requires vigilant oversight as circumstances on the ground are always changing. One of the more challenging species to track and monitor is the Canadian moose. Can the minister shed some light on what his ministry is doing to ensure that moose populations are well managed and protected?

Hon. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member for the question. Above all, my ministry is concerned with the well-being of our wildlife and the support of our outdoor recreation activities, such as hunting and fishing, that form a part of our heritage.

The iconic moose is a majestic animal and a staple of Ontario's landscape. Moose hunting contributes over \$205 million a year to Ontario's economy and forms a key part of the livelihoods and cultures of our northern communities and First Nations. We are improving how moose are managed to ensure sustainable populations while making tag allocations fairer and more consistent.

The task of wildlife management is not a simple one. No region is perfectly alike, and it's important for us to listen to the concerns of all parties in all regions of this

province as we improve the moose hunting system in Ontario.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: Speaker, I'm glad that after so many years of Liberal inattention, we have a minister who understands the importance of fish and wildlife in our province, within our culture and within our economy. This iconic animal, in particular, is so important to the health of our ecosystems and to our rich hunting tradition in the province of Ontario.

Minister, I know you've already done so much to improve the state of hunting and fishing for people in Ontario. Last year, you convened the Big Game Management Advisory Committee, an independent, third-party committee comprised of hunters and experts that uses data from wildlife population surveys for the purpose of gathering recommendations, all for the purpose of ensuring a fair and sustainable management of our big game species.

How is the Ontario government addressing hunters' concerns about accessibility, their concerns about the fairness of the draw system, and how are you working to modernize the process?

Hon. John Yakubuski: I again thank the member for his question. I'd be happy to outline some of the things we've done so far. In order to protect the population of the species, we are proposing stricter calf tag quotas, new bow hunting seasons and quotas for moose. As it stands now, some hunters have been applying year after year for the tag draw but have never received one.

Beginning in 2021, we are introducing common sense and fairness to the process by making it easier for those who've been consistently unsuccessful in the draw to receive a tag. Changes like that are what we're all about in this government: listening to the concerns of the people of Ontario and making common-sense changes that bring fairness and accountability to the government and the management of our resources and the environment.

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SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mr. Joel Harden: My question is for the Premier. As many kids in Ottawa head back to class this week, I'm thinking in particular of students with disabilities and their families, like Megan Leslie, a proud mom of a deaf son in elementary school who is beside herself right now because she cannot find access to American Sign Language interpretation.

For Megan's son, and 340,000 other special education students in Ontario, this pandemic has been particularly challenging. Instead of giving students with disabilities the resources they need to thrive, this government has allocated a paltry \$70 per student for its COVID response in our schools.

Can the minister explain to Megan why he believes \$70 per student is enough to support her son's learning needs?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I know that for all students with exceptionality and disability that we have in our province we have an obligation to ensure they're supported. It is why we have successively, throughout this pandemic, increased investment in both mental health and special education. We are seeing net hiring of more EAs, supported by an additional \$12.5 million for spec ed and \$30 million more in a one-time, one-year investment to hire more psychologists, psychotherapists and social workers in the province of Ontario, in addition to \$50 million for equity, for technology to make sure that we equalize access, particularly for those kids.

We're ensuring IEPs are being followed. We've asked every student to have five days' provision of in-class supports, creating consistency in their lives which so many of their parents have asked for. We're fully committed to working with those children to give them an opportunity to learn and to be safe in school.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: For months, grassroots disability leaders have insisted that this government do more. Now we have a situation where a deaf child in Ottawa may not even be able to understand what's going on in his class. That's how bad it has gotten.

Being included at school means being able to participate in the classroom. That means ASL interpretation and educational assistants to help autistic students, dyslexic students, Down syndrome students or students with pronounced social anxiety.

We need strong provincial funding—not \$70 per student—to accommodate these students at this remarkable time, but, so far, candidly, through you, Speaker, this government has failed them. Can the minister tell us when kids with disabilities in particular will be treated seriously by this government and get the support and funding they deserve?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I want to note for that child in Ottawa that the director of the Ottawa Catholic School Board, Tom D'Amico, said that, this year, class sizes will be smaller than ever before because the board has a plenitude of teachers. They are hiring in real time. That is not a unique experience. We are seeing hiring province-wide in public and Catholic education. Moreover, we're seeing an additional \$12.5 million being dedicated for special education, plus those mental health investments.

We recognize that on those parents it has been most especially challenging. It's why we insist, for every school board, that those children, irrespective of those challenges—that they're there every single day, that they have access to five days of consistent learning in school. We are hiring more EAs. We are providing more technology and more PPE to their staff members to keep them safe.

We are fully committed to ensuring that every child sees himself or herself reflected in their schools and they

can be supported as they go through the journey of learning.

PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKERS

Mr. Mike Schreiner: My question is for the Premier, but first, I want to thank everyone who's worked so hard for Ontarians during this pandemic. I'd like to welcome back all MPPs, journalists and staff.

During the last seven months, we have heard the Premier say that PSWs are the real heroes of this crisis, that they are champions, but these heroes need more than empty words. They need a living wage so they don't have to run from one low-paying job to the next. These heroes are overwhelmingly women and people of colour who work incredibly long and hard hours to care for our loved ones.

Speaker, I have one simple question: Will the Premier raise wages for PSWs, so these front-line heroes are treated like the working heroes they really are?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond on behalf of the government, the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much for the question. This is a really important issue. Of course, we're very, very grateful for the work that has been done by all of our front-line workers—doctors, nurses, personal support workers, staff, volunteers, everyone—but you're right: Personal support workers are in a particular situation. We are graduating thousands of personal support workers every year, but they are dropping out for various reasons—pay being one of them, but there are other reasons, as well. We are working steadily towards a solution for this, which I'll address more in my supplementary.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, I believe the minister needs to understand the critical staffing shortages our long-term-care facilities face. The recent LTC staffing study over the summer found that half of PSWs working in long-term care leave after five years "due to burnout of working short-staffed."

These front-line heroes are tired. They're overworked. They're underpaid. They did not stop being heroes on August 13, when pandemic pay ended. We could be on the brink of a second wave in our long-term-care homes. The issue is dire and urgent.

Speaker, will the government commit today to immediately addressing the staffing shortages in our long-term-care homes and extending pandemic pay for all front-line health care heroes?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, I certainly can agree with you that there is an urgent need for personal support workers in our long-term-care homes, but also in home and community care. You're absolutely right that we need to make sure that we have the health human resources necessary in order to fight a potential second wave of COVID-19. We have a fall preparedness plan that is

virtually ready to go, and that is one of the important issues that it does address: the lack of personal support workers in particular, but there are also shortages of nurses, as well.

We know that we need to do that in order to be able to successfully fight a second wave of COVID-19, and we are addressing that both with respect to the pay issue, but also with respect to scheduling of hours, work locations and the ability to ladder—to be able to help personal support workers to be able to move from that level further into the health care system, to perhaps become registered practical nurses or registered nurses. They need to see a future in health care, and we are looking at all of those aspects with our health human resources plan, which we will be discussing with everyone in the Legislature very shortly.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mrs. Nina Tangri: Good morning, Speaker, and to everyone in the House today.

My question is for the Solicitor General. Last week, I was pleased to join the Solicitor General and Ontario Provincial Police Commissioner Carrique to open a new OPP highway safety division detachment in my riding of Mississauga–Streetsville.

I know that constituents in my community have been concerned about safety on our roads and highways, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. In May, for example, the OPP charged an individual for going 207 kilometres per hour on Highway 403 in Mississauga. This reflects a widespread increase in street racing and other driving offences on our roads and highways in the midst of COVID.

Can the Solicitor General explain how this new OPP detachment will help support community safety in Mississauga, particularly on our highways?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thanks to the member for Mississauga–Streetsville for her question. I know how important road safety is to her and for her constituents. I was pleased to join her and many other Peel MPPs, as well as Commissioner Carrique, in Mississauga last week.

I think it's really important that we understand that as we continue to respond to the unprecedented challenges presented by COVID 19, our government will continue to put safety first. Every day, hundreds of thousands of commuter vehicles and transport trucks use the 400-series highways in the region, which is why it's critical that police have the tools, resources and equipment needed to keep people safe.

1130

This \$200-million state-of-the-art facility will bring policing in the region into the 21st century, ensuring that front-line OPP officers who are working to keep the 400-series highways safe in Peel region and across the GTA can continue to do it with updated resources.

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

Mrs. Nina Tangri: Speaker, through you: Thank you to the Solicitor General for her response.

We know that while police services are reporting that some crime statistics have dropped during the course of this crisis, not all criminals are staying home. In August, Peel Regional Police seized 41 illegal guns off our streets. I'm sure we can agree that in the midst of this crisis, the last thing people need is fear of crime in their community.

Can the Solicitor General explain how the opening of this new OPP detachment in Mississauga fits with our government's commitment to keeping our communities safe?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The member is absolutely correct. Ontarians should never have to live in fear of crime, least of all during the pandemic.

The opening of the Mississauga detachment is part of our government's OPP modernization phase 2 project. This is a \$182-million initiative to replace nine aging police detachments across Ontario and bring them into the 21st century. Many of these projects are coming to fruition, including in Little Current, Parry Sound and Clinton, with more in the coming weeks, and of course, the one in the member's riding, in Mississauga. This builds on a landmark \$20-million investment our government has made in Peel region with their police service earlier this year.

Whether it's addressing road user safety on our highways or tackling the pressing issue of gun and gang violence, our government is committed to ensuring that those on the front lines have the resources to keep their communities protected.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Doly Begum: My question is to the Acting Premier. This government continues to download the costs of child care onto parents who are struggling during COVID-19. Parents continue to be charged or risk losing their child's spot if they are not able to make the difficult decision to send their child within 14 days.

On the other hand, many child care centres have been forced to close because of low enrolment, increasing deficits and uncertainty about how this government will support them.

Mr. Speaker, will this government finally step up and support the child care sector that is hurting due to the lack of support from this government?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, our government has provided unprecedented access of investment and PPE to our child care operators, because we recognize from the moms and dads of this province that they need to have reliable access and affordable access to child care.

When we came to power two years ago, we inherited the most expensive child care as a consequence of the former Liberal government.

But we recognize that we have to do more for parents. It's why we are investing, on an annual basis, \$2 billion to support our operations and \$1 billion to construct 30,000 new child care spaces, 10,000 of which will be within our schools. We have a child care tax credit that is supporting parents—up to 75% of eligible expenses.

And just a week ago, I stood with my federal counterpart Minister Ahmed Hussen to announce an additional \$234.6 million in a safe restart to our child care sector, to backstop them and to support them as they go through this unprecedented challenge.

Speaker, we have provided more funding, PPE, training and clear protocols, and we'll continue to be there for our parents, for operators, and of course for our kids in this province.

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

Ms. Doly Begum: Mr. Speaker, we continue to hear press conference after press conference where the minister reannounces the same inadequate funding that came from the federal government.

Child care centres, workers and parents have continued to express their concern that they're being kept in the dark about how this government will support the child care sector that takes care of our children.

Will this government commit to being transparent with the parents of this province, the child care workers and the operators about what kind of support they will be receiving and when?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Speaker, I'm proud to report that child care operators are not waiting for investment. They have received investment every step of the way through this pandemic.

At the very beginning of this challenge, we ensured that operators had additional supports—stabilization funding, essentially—to backstop them, given the reduced amount of kids within our child care centres and the increased cost borne by our operators. We gave them support. We expanded PPE financing and funding for them, and of course, we've provided clear guidance developed by the medical community and endorsed by the Chief Medical Officer of Health. Every step of the way we've been there for our child care operators. We want parents to know that in this province, we will continue to do everything we can to ensure labour market access, to ensure that women, most notably, can participate in the economy and to make sure that their children remain safe along the way.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Ms. Lindsey Park: My question is for the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. Over the past several months, the impacts of COVID-19 have meant that people have been staying at home, that there has been widespread physical distancing, and that people are inundated, if they turn on the radio, television or their online news source, with information about the virus. That has been challenging for many people and families across Ontario.

Constituents in my riding of Durham have expressed concerns about their own mental health and their family members' and neighbours' mental health. As the member from Willowdale mentioned, they've been experiencing loneliness and, for some, depression at elevated levels that they haven't experienced before.

Our government has continued to address the mental health of all Ontarians since the start of the outbreak, and I wondered if the minister could update the Legislature on some of the things he has been working on to address the mental health and well-being of Ontarians during COVID-19.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: I would like to thank the member from Durham for that great question. Mr. Speaker, since the start of the outbreak, we've seen thousands of Ontarians reach out for help. It has been our mission to ensure that people in the province of all ages who need the extra help are able to access the supports that they need, when and where they need them.

That's why I was proud just recently to stand alongside Premier Ford to announce an increase to our \$12-million commitment to mental health and addictions during COVID-19 by another \$14.75 million. These investments will reach every corner of the province, from the GTA to rural and remote communities, including Indigenous communities across the province. Our government will always stand up for Ontarians living with mental health and addiction challenges and will ensure that people get the help they need when and where they need it.

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

Ms. Lindsey Park: I want to thank the minister for his work standing up for Ontarians who have been struggling during these unprecedented times. It's so good to hear this is helping people in every corner of the province, whether it's Kenora, Sault Ste. Marie, Hamilton or in my riding of Durham.

Our government has made a clear commitment to mental health and addiction treatment during COVID-19, which has touched the lives of all Ontarians of all ages. I wonder if the minister can update us on some of the specific types of services and supports that our investments will help to deliver.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Our investments include additional funding to expand virtual and online services being used by thousands of Ontarians, such as Internet-based cognitive behavioural therapy for those experiencing stress, anxiety and depression, and will also provide targeted virtual addictions supports to those in need. This investment also includes funding to specifically support culturally safe services for Indigenous people in Ontario, including a focus on children and youth.

Mr. Speaker, we're also proud to be investing over \$2.9 million to fund eight research projects that will help support Ontario's response to COVID-19.

Our government recognizes the long road to recovery that lies ahead and that much more needs to be done. That's why we'll continue working with our partners to enhance existing supports while exploring new and innovative services to ensure Ontarians receive the high-quality care they deserve.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Premier. Families are anxious about back-to-school during

this pandemic. Gail Young is concerned about classroom overcrowding. She says, "My grandchildren could bring home the virus."

Garry Cubitt believes that "the primary students and teachers are really at risk. They need smaller classes, masks, and separation."

Tina Walker points out, "Special-needs kids have not been addressed at all. The plan is unsafe, callous and risky."

Amy Colegate says, "I'm a parent of a vulnerable child and my own parents are seniors. I worry about the government prioritizing the economy over lives. When I say this, I don't mean it abstractly. The life of my child is at risk."

1140

Amy Coady says, "Please put children and families at the centre of the discussion. You have treated them like an afterthought."

Emily Walters asks for "more staffing, smaller class sizes and even more custodians."

Mike Mutimer says, "We only have one chance to do this properly. It can't be rushed and it can't be done just to satisfy reopening the economy. We need to make sure we're doing this right."

Speaker, will the Premier abandon his shortcut plan and instead do this right, make smaller classes and make children's well-being the priority this September?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you very much to the member opposite for the question. In the context of the broader risk we face, we have seen rising numbers of COVID-19 in the past days in this province. We have an obligation as a people to do everything humanly possible to reduce the risk. We have made incredible gains, as the Deputy Premier has made clear. We have all sacrificed—every single one of us—and we must maintain that momentum in order to ensure that these kids can continue to learn. That is our commitment. It's what we're doing in government, but we need all people to do their part.

In the area of Durham, for example, we have seen the net hiring of 32 public health nurses. I was pleased to meet with the chief medical officer of Durham just a few weeks ago with Minister Scott and Minister Bethlenfalvy. We were able to discuss with him the additional actions being taken to reduce the risk in that community. We have an additional \$3 million for teacher staffing provided in the context of COVID to that school board alone to hire more educators, to ensure more distancing and ultimately to ensure that all layers of prevention are in place to keep our students safe.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Again to the Premier: Parents have been sharing their concerns about back-to-school during COVID-19.

Heidi Wayling writes: "My five-year-old should be entering his second year in kindergarten. For the past two months my stress levels trying to decide what we are going

to do have been very high. It has only gotten worse the last couple of weeks.

“I do not feel he is safe, physically, mentally or emotionally, returning to his class of 29 kids and being told he must stay distanced from them all. How will this even be possible? He is very energetic, and will not be successful sitting at a table all day. At the same time, spending hours a day watching a teacher online is not in his best interest.

“I cry myself to sleep often. I feel like if I send him, I’m putting his life and the lives of our family members at risk. Most of my friends are very angry about the position we’ve been put in.”

Speaker, will the Premier change his mind and start capping class sizes and commit to parents like Heidi that their children will be able to learn safely while supported in smaller classes?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: In every school board in this province, including Durham public and Catholic, we are seeing net reduction in classroom size and the enhancement of distancing. I was in Durham just a few weeks ago with the Premier and with colleagues, with the members from Oshawa and from Whitby. I was proud to fund a \$29-million investment, the new Paul Dwyer that is in Oshawa, that’s going to make a big difference for hundreds of students in that community.

We are renewing schools—half a billion dollars—to give them the safest environments to learn on an annual basis. We will continue to lead and invest, to listen to the science and take every action to keep our students safe.

FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER

Mr. Stan Cho: My question this morning is to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. Young people are our future, and I think all members of this House will agree that it is crucial to protect and support that future. Today I’d like to ask the minister about a disability that affects one in 33 children born in this country. I’m talking about fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, or FASD, a lifelong disability that has no cure and affects all communities in Ontario and all ethnic, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

Our government knows that we need to support families impacted by FASD and to help them in ways that improve their day-to-day lives. Speaker, through you: Minister, can you tell us what our government is doing to support youth and families affected by FASD?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks very much to the member from Willowdale for the great question this morning.

Less than a month before COVID-19 hit the province, I had the opportunity to meet and interact with some of the remarkable children and families that are part of the rural FASD, or fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, network here at Queen’s Park. It was one of the most memorable moments that I’ve had in this role as minister in this portfolio. Those young people have hobbies, they have dreams, they have goals that they want to achieve, and we would like to give them the opportunity to achieve those goals by ensuring

the right supports are available from the provincial government. That’s why last week, during a visit in Kitchener–Waterloo, I announced that our government will be investing an additional \$3 million every year to expand and support services for families that are dealing with FASD. We want them to be able to access supports, build on their child’s strengths and have them feel more confident in addressing any challenges that may arise. We’ve heard loud and clear that these supports are making a difference. That’s why we’re ensuring that they are available to families dealing with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. Stan Cho: The minister is correct: It’s crucial that we support the youth living with FASD. But, Minister, what about those who go unsupported? We know that these youth can face incredible challenges in their lives, from increased mental health issues to run-ins with the youth justice system and struggles with substance abuse. We also know that there are two key components to addressing the harmful effects of FASD in Ontario: supporting those who are affected by it and raising awareness of the causes and effects of FASD.

Through you, Speaker: Minister, can you share with the House how that annual \$3-million investment is going to help those two objectives?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks again to the member from Willowdale. Over the next two years, our investment will be funding 26 more FASD support workers who will provide information, develop care plans, help families access resources and connect parents to support networks and diagnostic services.

We’re also introducing new family capacity-building workshops and service provider training, as well as continuing to support local family caregiver support groups. These groups will not only provide a support network for families going through similar challenges, it will allow families to share information and provide access to trained professionals to help them learn real-life tools and hands-on strategies that will support their children with FASD.

We have also introduced a new public awareness campaign, which is really important. It’s already under way and running through the month of October as well. It will build public awareness of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and the dangers of alcohol consumption during pregnancy, and will address the misconception that this is only an issue for women, rather than one that affects all of us. We all have a role to play in helping expectant parents have an alcohol-free pregnancy.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. I recently held a digital town hall across Niagara to hear from parents, educators, school staff and students to discuss the Ford government’s back-to-school plan. I had a teacher tell me, “It feels like we’re going down the runway but still trying to attach the wings to the plane.”

Most powerfully, we heard from an 11-year-old student who started a petition asking for smaller class sizes so he can return to school safely and see his friends.

Haley, a parent at my town hall, said, “We don’t see any direction from our government.” She tried to find the government’s child care plan on the website, and couldn’t actually find a plan anywhere.

Speaker, keeping our kids safe is the Premier’s responsibility. I’ll repeat that: It’s the Premier’s responsibility. He could use some of that \$6.7 billion he was supposed to spend combatting COVID-19, but hasn’t.

Parents are expecting and demanding responsible leadership. Will the Premier act today to make class sizes smaller, fix air filtration systems and ensure our kids can safely distance so the virus doesn’t spread in our community, and jeopardize—

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Last week, I was very proud to join my parliamentary assistant to visit schools, both Catholic and public. We visited Twenty Valley Public School, which is an amazing school in Lincoln. We met the principal, we met educators, we met the chair of the board. I’m proud to note that in that school, as in all schools we are seeing across the province, efforts have been made to reduce the classroom size, to maximize distancing, to assure safety.

We spoke to Chair Barnett as well as Chair Fera, both of whom are working very hard to ensure that all classrooms in our province have improved safety measures and layers of prevention in place. In that community, we’re seeing more outdoor experiential learning. We’re seeing an aggressive act to ensure cohorting is in place. We’re seeing co-operation by educators, administrators, public health and the Ministry of Education. We are all working together with a singular mission, which is to keep all students and all staff safe in this province.

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

There being no further business this morning, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1149 to 1300.

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to the order of the House dated March 19, 2020, I have received from the government House leader a letter indicating that it is in the public interest for committees to resume regular business as of September 21, 2020. Committees may therefore resume their regular meetings next week.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Pursuant to the order of the House dated May 12, 2020, I beg leave to present the second interim report, Economic Impact of COVID-19 on

Tourism, of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Sandhu has presented the committee’s report. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs is pleased to present its second interim report, Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Tourism. The Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries appeared as the first witness. Following the minister’s update, the committee heard from over 120 organizations, businesses and individuals from across the province representing the broad range of activities that constitute Ontario’s tourism sector.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank everyone who took the time to share their views and personal stories with us. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the committee, the Clerk of the Committee and the committee staff for their commitment, hard work and co-operation.

Report presented.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Pursuant to the order of the House dated May 12, 2020, I beg leave to present the third interim report, Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Culture and Heritage, of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Sandhu has presented the committee’s report. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs is pleased to present its third interim report, Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Culture and Heritage. The committee held four days of hearings, with the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries appearing as the first witness. The committee also heard from dozens of witnesses from this multi-faceted sector, including Ontario’s Big Eight culture and heritage powerhouses.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all the witnesses for speaking with us and everyone who sent in submissions. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the committee again, as well as the Clerk of the Committee and the committee staff for their commitment, hard work and co-operation.

Report presented.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT ACT (SICK NOTES), 2020

LOI DE 2020 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D’EMPLOI (NOTES MÉDICALES)

Mr. Schreiner moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 200, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of sick notes / Projet de loi 200, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne les notes médicales.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member for Guelph care to give a brief statement explaining his bill?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: This bill amends the Employment Standards Act, 2000, to ensure that employers are not permitted to require a sick note from a qualified health practitioner when an employee is ill.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

EDUCATION

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Back to school is always a significant time for parents, families, children, educators and staff, as well as school boards. However, this year we face challenges like we've never seen before. This was apparent as last week many students returned to schools across our great province. Unlike other years, this school year will see students in class while some will be doing remote learning from home.

I know that students, parents and teachers have some worries on the way forward. When I met a mom in Brampton last week, she was nervous. But she was tremendously inspired and reassured when she and I stood together to observe and be greeted by the principal, by positive educators, by well-trained and committed staff who had clearly demonstrated to those parents and to those kids that they have a thoughtful protocol in place to keep their kids safe. And we were both grateful—grateful to the principals, to our educators, to our custodians and to all staff who are working around the clock to get this right.

I'm honoured to stand in this House today to speak about our nation-leading reopening plan, a plan that has been approved by Dr. David Williams, the Chief Medical Officer of Health of this province, and supported by other leading health experts in Ontario.

As the chief medical officer has said, "So if there was any risk, I would not be recommending opening at this time. But we are concerned there's a risk of not opening and that the students need to be back in those settings for many reasons that our experts and scientists are recommending as well."

A lot of planning and work has gone into ensuring that Ontario's staff and students head back to schools safely, because students will benefit from being in class. This includes the hard work and dedication of Ontario's school boards, administrators, directors of education, chairs and trustees, working together to develop our reopening strategies with a singular mission, which is to keep all

students and all staff safe in Ontario. We know that a safe and healthy learning environment is essential for student achievement and for well-being.

Nous savons qu'un environnement d'apprentissage sûr et sain est fondamental pour la réussite et le bien-être des élèves.

In partnership with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the COVID-19 command table, medical experts, education sector experts, front-line workers, parents, students and teachers, I can say that since March, we have been working literally day and night to develop a comprehensive plan, a nation-leading plan, to ensure all kids are safe, to ensure they remain learning, led by an educator. And we're providing flexible options to parents, respecting their choices, and providing the resources to our boards, around the clock, for our kids. We know that they deserve no less.

When the school closures began, we acted quickly and decisively to close schools and to launch the Learn at Home portal. It was the first of its kind in our province's history. This was designed to provide valuable resources so that students could continue their education while schools were closed. This portal also provided resources directly to students and families to support their well-being and to promote positive mental health while they were at home.

In addition, over the summer, students and families were able to take advantage of expanded summer learning opportunities right across Ontario. Over 150,000 students enrolled in credit-bearing secondary school programs, including more than 21,000 students who took Reach Ahead credits. Elementary students participated in literacy and numeracy programs, and students with special education needs and mental health concerns participated in new targeted transition programs in preparation for this coming year.

1310

At the end of July, we officially unveiled our provincial school reopening plan. I want to be clear: This plan is the most comprehensive in this country, supported by the highest level of provincial investment in the country and fully informed by the leading medical and scientific minds of our country. This plan is approved by the Chief Medical Officer of Health and other leading experts. It is nation-leading. It prioritizes health and safety above all else and provides school boards with the resources, the flexibility, to accommodate those regional differences in trends of key public health indicators.

In fact, our government is providing an unprecedented \$1.3 billion in a one-time investment this year to ensure that all schools are safe in this province. This support is in addition to the landmark annual investment of over \$25.5 billion in education, which represents an increase of \$736 million for the 2020-21 school year, compared to that of last year.

Our plan leads in dollars and in science. Our plan has led to class sizes being reduced in all regions of this province. The COVID-19 supports, which are more than any other jurisdiction in Canada, will help to implement

physical distancing measures, support the hiring of up to 1,300 custodians, adopt comprehensive and enhanced cleaning protocols in all schools and on all buses, and hire more teachers—thousands of new teachers—in a one-time investment to reduce classroom size as we respond to this pandemic. It will also help public health hire over 620 school-focused nurses to provide rapid-response supports to schools and boards to facilitate public health measures, including screening and surveillance testing, tracing and mitigation strategies province-wide.

Speaker, while we know that a majority of parents have chosen in-class learning for their children, we also have strengthened remote learning options for Ontario students. This is because we believe that there should be equal opportunities for learning, regardless of the choice parents make for their child and for their family. We fully believe that students should be together in a dynamic, live, safe learning environment led by their teacher if they're unable to physically be in those classrooms.

We're providing students and families with clear and transparent standards for those who choose remote learning, which is teacher-led, which is timetabled, live, synchronous and on a regular, daily schedule. We're making massive investments in remote learning to support them, to ensure that every school board offering virtual learning has a dedicated principal and administrative support, to ensure that it is comprehensive, challenging and as close to the in-class experience as possible.

That's not all, Speaker. Funding is also allocated to school boards to:

- hire additional staff to keep our classroom sizes down;
- provide additional resources and supplies to clean and sanitize school buses;
- provide additional supports for students with special education needs and for students with mental health challenges;
- improve ventilation, airflow, air quality system effectiveness in our province; and
- provide technology to support the procurement of over 30,000 new tablets for families in need in this province.

My ministry has also been working in collaboration with the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services to ensure that sufficient personal protective equipment has been delivered to all school boards and to all school authorities in this province—over 37 million pieces of PPE just for September alone. This includes 19.5 million masks, 16 million gloves, 317,000 face shields, 320,000 bottles of hand sanitizer, 218,000 containers of disinfectant—the list goes on, but the fact is, we've given them what they need to keep our schools and our buses safe.

We've also supported First Nation education partners, ensuring that they had timely access to the PPE that they needed to open their schools and safely bus within their communities.

Our plan is also complemented by the federal government, which is providing \$380 million to Ontario—providing supports to all provinces in the federation—in

support of safe and healthy schools in this province. Our plan will be strengthened by this additional support, even at this late stage.

We are grateful for any investment by all levels to ensure that our schools can be as safe as humanly possible as we respond to this unprecedented pandemic and economic recession.

The funding, which we received on the day of its announcement—we immediately provided certainty to the sector by being very clear on where those dollars would flow—will include \$200 million to support our reopening plan; specifically, to give boards the ability to hire additional staff, be it custodians, focusing on things like Internet connectivity, HVAC systems. We gave boards latitude to put it towards the health and safety priorities of their communities.

We've also given an additional \$70 million—on top of the \$30 million we unveiled recently to support additional teacher hiring, which will support, as I noted, north of 2,000 educators in Ontario—in transportation funding. This includes the renewal of the driver retention program, to help our bus drivers and to incent them to stay and do their important work. We've also provided \$25 million on route protection, to make sure that they are more reliable for parents.

For special education, there's an additional \$12.5 million to hire more EAs in this province, recognizing the acute challenges on those children and on those families. We've provided north of \$30 million in mental health supports—of the federal money, we've dedicated money for mental health and special education to achieve that—\$12.5 million to hire another 125 public health nurses, bolstered by the existing 500 funded exclusively by our province and government; \$36 million to remote learning capacity to make sure that we have the technology, the administrative supports and ultimately the wherewithal to ensure that all children who choose online learning have a solid educational experience with an educator leading them live.

We're also setting aside \$50 million for future challenges that we are starting to see manifested, be it in the context of influenza or other issues that can arise. We will be ready, with the funding in place and the monies to flow immediately as the risks arise.

Our government has also released our management plan for schools, developed by medical leaders with one aim, and that is to maximize safety and minimize the risk to all of our children. Operational Guidance: COVID-19 Management in Schools was developed in consultation with public health leaders and the Chief Medical Officer of Health, and aims to keep schools safe and ultimately isolate COVID-19 cases and reduce the spread of COVID-19 within our schools and, really, within our communities.

We named Dr. Dirk Huyer as Coordinator, Provincial Outbreak Response. In his role, he will lead the province's efforts to prevent and minimize COVID-19 outbreaks in a number of sectors, but most especially within education and child care, within our schools. We have the resources in place, from nursing to testing and enhanced screening

and cleaning, to help prevent the spread, coupled with a comprehensive plan to respond to any challenge, immediately and decisively, under the leadership of Dr. Huyer and the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

We're providing school boards and school authorities with guidance to help them consistently implement prevention measures, maintain accurate records of staff, students and visitors, and work with their local public health units to take appropriate and decisive action when warranted. The document also outlines recommendations for what parents could do to support their kids.

The government's plan also includes a protocol developed to deal with students who have become ill while they are at school, including isolation, providing PPE to the ill student and to the staff supporting them, and a clear communication expectation to the parent, to the board and to public health.

School boards will be required to work closely with public health units to communicate updates in real time.

It was this government, supported by the Treasury Board minister as well as the Minister of Health and I, that put out a website to publicly and transparently disclose the data that all parents are entitled to in this province in the context of COVID-19 in our schools.

Led by Public Health Ontario, we are unveiling an asymptomatic testing protocol and regime for high school students that will be expansive and focus on the higher-risk communities of this province.

We're taking every measure to put the health and safety of students and staff first. All parents should know that our government remains committed to the health and safety of all students, families and staff, and we are leaning on the advice of medical experts who are helping to develop and support our plan.

Mr. Speaker, these are the ways in which our government is demonstrating our commitment to keeping our schools, educators, staff and students safe in Ontario.

I want to take a moment to express gratitude. As I said off the top, what I've seen in urban and rural parts of our province is an incredible unity and a commitment to the safety of kids. I have seen the professionalism, the thoughtfulness and the can-do spirit that has been embraced by our educators, our staff, our custodians, our bus drivers, our principals—every single person in our schools is doing everything they can, and we are eternally grateful for their commitment and for their absolute support of the safety of our kids.

Now we have a duty as a province to do our part to continue to flatten the curve, to take every single action possible to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our community that, as Dr. Williams has said, can be and will be reflected within our schools. We have to do more in this respect. I know the people of Ontario will continue to make those sacrifices and to do their part as the example we are to the world of what collaboration and commitment to the safety of each other represents.

I encourage every member in this House today to continue to support your communities as we make our way

through these uncharted waters during this challenging and unprecedented time.

1320

While our government's plan will continue to evolve and will respond to the changing threat of COVID-19, I want to reiterate my personal commitment that we will remain steadfast, constant and consistent in our efforts to keep Ontario's education system and our schools as safe as possible. That includes investing in the necessary staffing resources and cleaning supports, reducing those classroom sizes, hiring more nurses, as well as maintaining strict health and safety protocols to keep our communities and our classrooms safe.

Our government has said that we are putting a pause on loosening of any further public health restrictions, as noted by the Minister of Health. We are taking this step to limit the spread in our community, to help keep the virus out of our schools. Our province has the duty, the responsibility, Speaker, to reduce the spread and to combat these rising numbers, as we're seeing in communities across our province. And I know we will come together in this time of need, as our nation always has.

Together we're doing what we are doing to protect the health and safety of our students and staff. It is comprehensive, and we want our next generation of scientists and researchers, our skilled workers and community leaders, to be the best they can be, knowing that they have sound access to education and that they are safe along the way. This is all about ensuring a bright future for the next generation, and for this we are all grateful and we are all proud.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses.

Ms. Marit Stiles: It gives me great pleasure to speak today about the return to school.

In response to the minister's comments—the minister spoke a lot about confidence in the system. I have to say that what we are seeing in our school system right now is actually closer to chaos, Mr. Speaker. In fact, what we are seeing is the opposite of confidence on the part of our communities, parents and students alike. We've seen, as I mentioned in my question this morning, record numbers of students actually opting out of school at a time when we know that many students are desperate to be back in school, to see their friends and to see their teachers. It gives you some insight into how little confidence they and their families have in this government's bargain basement plan.

Back in July, I proposed an emergency action plan in a motion to this government. It took months before we saw any sort of plan emerge. And in those months, we wonder what they were doing, because we still, to this day, have not seen the kind of investment we need to see to stabilize the child care sector. We still haven't seen a commitment to paid sick leave and other job protections for the many, many parents who we know will, in all likelihood, have to remain at home for at least part of the time over the next few months and risk their jobs, their livelihood and putting food on the table.

The minister talked a lot about flexibility being built into the system, but as I pointed out this morning in my

question, we don't want investments down the road, if necessary. We want it now. We need it now. We need it today. The minister knows exactly what needs to happen. I think parents across the province, like myself, like many of my colleagues in this room, are wondering, what's he waiting for? Why is he wasting all this time in the Legislature trying to convince us? He should be out there fixing the problem. It is absolutely outrageous.

I won't go into great detail, Mr. Speaker, but I will tell you that the numbers the minister is using are questionable. When you look at how this government is funding this COVID-19 return to school, it really amounts to—because he claims all the time that there are more teachers being added to the school system. It works out to about one teacher for every four schools. That's a quarter of a teacher per school. And even if every school board in this province dug in and spent every penny of their reserves, that would mean only one teacher for every 700 students. That is not going to cut it. We know it. You know it. Why aren't you doing something about it? And why are you risking the lives of our children and the health of our communities?

Mr. Speaker, I want to speak for a moment on behalf of many small business people and employers I've spoken to over the last few months who have also alerted me to their concerns with this government's failure of a plan to return to school. At the end of the day, it's not going to just be about, of course, what we worry about—people getting sick, children getting sick, families getting sick, communities getting sick—but it is going to mean that all of our efforts to stabilize and renew our economy are going down the toilet. It is unacceptable, and I really would encourage all of those employers to speak out and share their concerns with this government, because maybe they will listen to you.

I also wanted to add, because we talked about it this morning—the minister is often referring to these smaller class-size caps. He was right about one thing, which is the amazing work that our teachers, our education workers, our trustees, our school boards, our students have been doing to prepare for this moment, for this return to school, in spite of this government's plan. It is the school boards and their creativity, their digging into their reserves that has enabled them to create some classes of 15—just a few here and there—for the neediest communities, the neediest students, but it is absolutely in spite of this government's failures on ventilation, on busing, on class sizes.

I just want to ask the minister one more time: Please, don't bring it in here. Go out there, fix it, do the right thing. Our students and our families and our communities are counting on you.

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

Responses?

Mr. Michael Coteau: I want to start by saying that I've been involved with public education for about 18 years, either as an MPP or as a trustee, and of those 18 years I have to say that this has been the most challenging time

for me when it comes to responding to parents—but also as a father of two young girls, one going into grade 5 and one going into grade 9. It was a really difficult time for us, over the last month, to make a decision. I didn't want to make a decision until I actually knew what the classroom sizes were. My grade 5 daughter—we're fortunate that her classroom size is going to be pretty low. It's about 20, so the school is doing very well.

The problem that we're encountering in the community is with the grades around grade 4, grade 5 to about grade 8, and specifically grades 7 and 8. At one of my schools, I met with the parents on Sunday. Yes, people may know that there's an average we look for—I think it's 24.5—but there's no cap on those numbers, so they can go up based on configuration. The problem in our community right now is that all of our grade 7 and grade 8 classes at one particular middle school—and it's the only middle school where I've met the school council—the numbers are all at 36. To me, this is completely unacceptable. Not only are those numbers at 36, but we can't expect kids to jump on a school bus with 60 kids for an hour in an enclosed space like that. When it gets colder, those windows will be shut.

My question to the members opposite—mostly the backbenchers; there are mostly backbenchers here: Would you send your child to a class with 36 students in it? If you've gone into a school recently—some of these classrooms are quite small.

The minister talked a lot about making sure they have their PPE, making sure they have the best plan and making sure the system is designed in a certain way, but the minister needs to get into a classroom. If he's so confident that these are great numbers, why aren't he and the Premier going into a classroom with 36 students for a day? I challenge them to do that. If the minister wants to talk about his plans, come to meet these parents at Don Mills Middle School, where there are 36 kids in a classroom—currently, that's the number—and explain to those parents why those numbers are so high.

Make no mistake, this comes down to one issue: The Conservative government does not want to spend the money to lower classroom sizes and hire more teachers. That's how simple it is. You can talk about your strategic plan. You can talk about your PPE. You can talk about your investment of \$1.3 billion—which is less than 1% or around 1% of the entire COVID-19 response in Ontario—on children and youth and education, so child care and education. The simple fact is that this government will not invest the money.

I would say this with complete confidence—and I'll probably get heckled by members across there—if there was a Liberal government in power today in Ontario that had to make a decision—I'll even go so far as to say the NDP. If there was a Liberal government in power in Ontario today, they would make the investment into supporting our children, and we would be hiring more teachers and making more investments into education.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

1330

Mr. Michael Coteau: The simple fact is that the Conservative government does not want to invest into children in the province of Ontario, and it's very clear. Through you, Mr. Speaker: Anyone on that opposite side who has a kid who's in a classroom with 36 students, let me know, and then I'll believe that you think that plan's great. But I can guarantee you this: If they had to make that choice between sending a child into a classroom with 36 kids, no one on that side would make that decision. I'd like to know.

Hon. Ross Romano: I already made that decision.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Okay. I'd love to know.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise to respond to the education minister. While I respect the fact that he says he's been working hard on the government's plan, I want to know why the plan was delivered late and why the plan doesn't follow the primary recommendation from health care experts to lower class sizes.

The bottom line is, the reason parents, students, educators, small business owners, people are so concerned about the flaws in this back-to-school plan is that classrooms are overcrowded and buses are overcrowded. Right now, according to the Financial Accountability Officer, there is \$6.7 billion of unallocated funds. Why don't we spend that on our children? Because the return on investment in our children is priceless.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, I am seeking unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding the order of precedence for private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Calandra is seeking unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice regarding the order of precedence for private members' public business. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that a change be made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business, such that Ms. McKenna assumes ballot item number 10 and Mr. Kanapathi assumes ballot item number 53.

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

Motion agreed to.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Hon. Paul Calandra: This is a motion on committee membership changes: that the following changes be made to membership of the following committees:

On the Standing Committee on Estimates, Ms. Skelly replaces Ms. Triantafilopoulos;

On the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, Mr. Kanapathi replaces Ms. Skelly; and

On the Standing Committee on Social Policy, Ms. Triantafilopoulos be added.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Calandra has moved that the following changes be made to membership of the following committees:

On the Standing Committee on Estimates, Ms. Skelly replaces Ms. Triantafilopoulos;

On the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, Mr. Kanapathi replaces Ms. Skelly; and

On the Standing Committee on Social Policy, Ms. Triantafilopoulos be added.

The member for Timmins?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm not going to hold up the debate here for very long, but I just hope this is a signal that the government is trying to send to the opposition and to the rest of the members of the House that they will actually utilize committees in a way that allows us to do some of the critical work that needs to be done, especially around those committees that are the ones that hold the government to account.

For example, there is the committee where we appoint public appointees that has not met for a long period of time. I would imagine that it would be interesting—in order to have some of those people appear before committee. And there are other committees that are oversight committees that need to do some work. So I'm hoping that the government, in a spirit of co-operation, is indicating these committee changes because they will co-operate and actually allow these committees, especially the oversight committees, to do the work that needs to be done in order to be able to hold this government to account.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Does the government House leader wish to respond?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Just briefly, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member opposite for his comments. He will of course know that earlier today we did provide notice that all committees would resume as of September 21.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Calandra has moved that the following changes be made to membership of the following committees—

Interjection: Dispense.

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

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I have a petition here about essential caregivers, "More Than ... a Visitor." It's been signed by over 2,300 people.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government's guidelines restricting essential caregivers and support persons has increased social isolation, and negatively impacted the

mental, emotional, physical health and well-being of residents in congregate care settings; and

“Whereas essential caregivers (often family members and support persons) are more than just visitors, and individuals have the right to access their essential caregivers in their agreed upon, preferred manner; and

“Whereas the provincial government should not unilaterally develop policies regarding access to essential caregivers, and must consult residents, patients, families, experts and workers when developing new policies; and

“Whereas individuals should not be prevented from accessing their essential caregiver(s), including during the state of emergency or the pandemic (COVID-19), while congregate settings should receive the resources they need to safely implement caregiver access;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately implement a COVID-19 essential caregiver strategy.”

Speaker, I fully support this petition. I will sign it and hand it to the Clerks.

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Dave Smith: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas now more than ever, people across Ontario need reliable broadband to work, learn and connect with friends and family; and

“Whereas too many people in our province lack reliable Internet or cellular access—or don’t have any connectivity at all; and

“Whereas the digital divide has been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically for rural and northern Ontarians;

“Whereas rural and northern Ontario businesses continue to face challenges accessing the 21st century digital economy which creates a serious economic disadvantage when following the advice of health officials during the COVID-19 pandemic; and

“Whereas as Ontario carefully reopens the economy, every region and every community must play a role in attracting jobs and investments to restore economic prosperity to the province; and

“Whereas investing in reliable broadband and cellular service creates greater opportunity for families, farmers and small business owners in rural and remote areas not only during the COVID-19 pandemic but after the pandemic ends;

“Whereas Ontario is investing \$150 million in a new program that, when leveraged with partner funding, has the potential to result in a total investment of \$500 million to improve broadband and cellular coverage service in underserved and unserved communities;

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

“Urge the federal Minister of Infrastructure, the federal Minister of Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development and the federal Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry to provide Ontario with its fair share

of funding through the Universal Broadband Fund and to commit additional funding to the province so that:

“(1) All of Ontario’s underserved and unserved communities can access reliable broadband service;

“(2) Ontario’s rural and northern communities can have the same opportunities for economic growth, recovery and participation in the 21st century digital economy as urban municipalities;

“(3) Ontarians in rural and northern communities can access government services, conduct business and connect with loved ones especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

I fully endorse this petition, will sign my name to it and give it to a page.

FALSTAFF COMMUNITY

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I would like to present this petition by the members of the community of Falstaff, Amina Hagi and Jamad Jama.

1340

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Falstaff community is comprised of residents who have strong ambitions. They have aspirations for systemic change. However, the community has been dealing with increased level of gun violence which has left the community to live in constant fear and are unable to deal with their day-to-day activities due to the ongoing shootings. The residents of Falstaff are left to deal with these traumatic events on their own. The community is constantly stormed with presence of media always covering the worst of the neighbourhood, leaving many to discriminate against the community.

“Aside from the increased level of violence, the residents struggle with challenges including underemployment, lack of adequate services and social infrastructure. As a community, we put our safety at the hands of all levels of government, however these issues time and time again are not only being addressed but no actions are being taken.

“As a community, we had enough and are demanding immediate changes starting with our number one priority which is our safety.

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to create the following:

“—24-hour surveillance security with a gated community;

“—secure employment opportunities and employ residents to work in the community;

“—involve the decision-making of the community with residents;

“—show the budget breakdown in regards to the Falstaff community;

“—accessible spaces for residents to create programs led by the residents;

“—TCH needs to take more accountability for repairs and maintenance;

—increase resources for better education by providing more teachers, special education and smaller class sizes for the neighbouring schools in the community;

—access to better quality food both in the schools and food banks;

—increase doctors and” times to work.

I support this petition, add my signature and send it to the page to deliver to the table.

ROAD SAFETY

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which reads as follows:

“Whereas tow truck operators provide an important service across Ontario’s road network; and

“Whereas motorists deserve reliable, timely service from their provider of choice across Ontario; and

“Whereas towing operators deserve a safe place to work in urban and rural communities across Ontario without being subjected to repetitive and punitive costs; and

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

“To protect motorists and towing companies providing important services by addressing issues around highway incident management;

“To include incident scene management in regulations to address the potential for improper actions on scene;

“To support the towing industry and reduce costs to motorists and third parties by mandating a single provincial towing licence;

“To introduce regulations that ensure long-term vitality of the towing industry; and

“To implement a towing mobile rideshare application.”

Of course, I support this petition, affix my signature and give it to the page.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Catherine Fife: This petition is entitled, “Support Bill 153, the Till Death Do Us Part Act.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there are 35,000 people on the wait-list for long-term care; and

“Whereas the median wait time for a long-term-care bed has risen from 99 days in 2011-12 to 152 days in 2018-19; and

“Whereas according to Home Care Ontario, the cost of a hospital bed is \$842 a day, while the cost of a long-term-care bed is \$126 a day; and

“Whereas couples should have the right to live together as they age; and

“Whereas Ontario seniors have worked hard to build this province and deserve dignity in care; and

“Whereas Bill 153 amends the Residents’ Bill of Rights in the Long-Term Care Homes Act to provide the resident with the right upon admission to continue to live with their spouse or partner;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Minister of Long-

Term Care to pass Bill 153 and provide seniors with the right to live together as they age.”

It’s my pleasure to affix my signature to this amazing petition and pass it on to the page.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Mr. Michael Parsa: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the global competition to secure critical personal protective equipment and medical supplies is fierce; and

“Whereas in the face of a global shortage of medical equipment, Ontario-based companies have stepped up in a big way to produce these items in order to ensure our front-line workers are protected against COVID-19; and

“Whereas Ontario is making considerable progress in” producing “critical supplies and equipment, while the global supply chains remain constrained; and

“Whereas nothing is more important than protecting the health and safety of patients and the workers caring for them, as well as our first responders;

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

“Proceed as expediently as possible to continue to ensure that patients, front-line health care workers and first responders have the critical equipment and supplies they need to protect themselves during the COVID-19, so that:

“(1) Ontario continues to procure vital supplies and personal protective equipment through its traditional suppliers and donations, as well as working in collaboration with the federal government, other provinces, and Ontario’s manufacturers;

“(2) Maintaining Ontario’s same-day deliveries to hospitals, long-term-care and retirement homes and other facilities to support essential workers in all settings and ensuring supplies and equipment are expedited to those most in need;

“(3) The province continues to collectively explore how to overcome supply chain challenges, including through domestic production opportunities and the safe reprocessing of supplies.”

I support this petition, will add my name to it and hand it over to the page.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: This petition is “Temperatures in LTC Homes.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the province of Ontario requires a minimum but no maximum temperature in long-term-care homes;

“Whereas temperatures that are too hot can cause emotional and physical distress that may contribute to a decline in a frail senior’s health;

“Whereas front-line staff in long-term-care homes also suffer when trying to provide care under these conditions with headaches, tiredness, signs of hyperthermia, which directly impacts resident/patient care;

“Whereas Ontario’s bill of rights for residents of Ontario nursing homes states ‘every resident has the right to be properly sheltered ... in a manner consistent with his or her needs’;

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

“Direct the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations amending O. Reg. 79/10 in the Long-Term Care Homes Act to establish a maximum temperature in Ontario’s long-term-care homes.”

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Donna Skelly: “Equitable Broadband Access for All Ontario Businesses and Residents.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas now more than ever, people across Ontario need reliable broadband to work, learn and connect with friends and family; and

“Whereas too many people in our province lack reliable Internet or cellular access—or don’t have any connectivity at all; and

“Whereas the digital divide has been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically for rural and northern Ontarians;

“Whereas rural and northern Ontario businesses continue to face challenges accessing the 21st century digital economy which creates a serious economic disadvantage when following the advice of health officials during the COVID-19 pandemic; and

“Whereas as Ontario carefully reopens the economy, every region and every community must play a role in attracting jobs and investments to restore economic prosperity to the province; and

“Whereas investing in reliable broadband and cellular service creates greater opportunity for families, farmers and small business owners in rural and remote areas not only during the COVID-19 pandemic but after the pandemic ends;

“Whereas Ontario is investing \$150 million in a new program that, when leveraged with partner funding, has the potential to result in a total investment of \$500 million to improve broadband and cellular coverage service in underserved and unserved communities;

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

“Urge the federal Minister of Infrastructure, the federal Minister of Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development and the federal Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry to provide Ontario with its fair share of funding through the Universal Broadband Fund and to commit additional funding to the province so that:

“(1) All of Ontario’s underserved and unserved communities can access reliable broadband service;

“(2) Ontario’s rural and northern communities can have the same opportunities for economic growth, recovery and participation in the 21st century digital economy as urban municipalities;

“(3) Ontarians in rural and northern communities can access government services, conduct business and connect with loved ones especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

1350

I support this petition and will assign my signature and give it to one of the ushers.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Suze Morrison: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas” the Premier and the Minister of Education “have failed to provide the funding or the plan needed to ensure that kids can return to schools and child care centres in a safe and supportive way;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to implement an immediate action plan that includes:

“—paid sick leave and parental leave in any modified return;

“—immediate funding to stabilize the child care sector to prevent fee increases and layoffs;

“—increased funding for teacher hiring, busing, school repairs and cleaning;

“—expanded funding for child care and schools and for ... smaller classes;

“—real collaboration with front-line education workers, students, parents and school boards through a COVID-19 recovery advisory group.”

I fully endorse the petition and will affix my signature to it and deliver it to the Clerks.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that, notwithstanding any standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 154, An Act to proclaim Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day, the order of the House dated December 5, 2019, referring the bill to the Standing Committee on Social Policy be discharged, and the bill ordered for third reading; and

That, notwithstanding any standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 182, An Act to amend the Franco-Ontarian Emblem Act, 2001, the order of the House dated March 12, 2020, referring the bill to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills be discharged, and the bill be ordered for third reading; and

That, notwithstanding any standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 131, An Act to proclaim the month of July as Tibetan Heritage Month, when the order for second reading of the bill is called, the Speaker shall put the question on the motion for second reading of the bill without debate or amendment; and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called the same day; and

That, notwithstanding any standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 180, An Act to proclaim Somali Heritage Week, when the order for second reading of the bill is called, the Speaker shall put the question on the motion for second reading of the bill without debate or amendment; and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called the same day.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Mr. Calandra has moved government notice of motion number 87.

Government House leader?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'll attempt to be very, very brief on this, in order to both welcome all of the members back to the assembly, after what was a very shortened summer recess and time back in everybody's communities, and continue on the hard work that I know all members on both sides of the House have been doing, really, since this Parliament began, but in particular over the last number of months, as we all try to deal with COVID-19 and the number of issues that are faced by people in our constituencies.

I also wanted to congratulate and thank all of the members of the standing committee on finance—the Chair and all members on both sides of the House who sat a countless number of hours on that committee, meeting well into the night, until 8:30, 9 o'clock at night, even beyond. I think they set a record for witnesses. Again, it's a testament to all of the hard work on both sides of the House on this. No witness who wanted to appear before the standing committee on finance was turned away. So I thank them very much and, of course, I thank all of the Clerks who also helped facilitate that study.

This motion today was recognition—it was tabled when we left here in July—of the fact, by and large, that thanks to the co-operation of the members opposite, the opposition—both the official opposition and the independents. They did provide us approval and the opportunity to move legislation very quickly from March right through to the end of June and well into July. But one of the consequences of that, Madam Speaker, as you know, was that we were not able to deal with private members' business during that time period. I think we all agree that private members' business is something that's very, very important, and that it's something that is of concern to all of us: not only members on this side of the House, but members on the opposite side of the House.

One of the commitments that the government did make and that the Premier said had to be accomplished was that we had to find a way to catch up and to allow all members the opportunity to address issues of importance to them in their communities. This motion starts that by elevating four bills, taking them out of committee and bringing them into the House.

To briefly touch on all four bills—I know they'll get much further debate. I've been asked a number of times why we selected these bills. Briefly, Madam Speaker, the rationale for bringing some of these private bills forward seemed very clear. The first one that we talked about here, to stop cyber-bullying, by the deputy whip, seemed very timely, given that the House would be returning back in

early September, when school was starting again—not that only our kids and children in school face this type of behaviour. But given how timely it is, I thought that would be something that the House would rightly be seized with.

One of the other bills that was being brought forward, by the member for Mississauga Centre, was with respect to emblems in the Franco-Ontarian flag. I think we would all agree that that is a bill that is long overdue, and I'm fairly confident that members on all sides of the House will be supportive of that.

Two other bills were brought forward, one by the member for Parkdale–High Park, which is a celebration of Tibetan heritage. If I'm not mistaken, the member for Parkdale–High Park is the first Tibetan Canadian to be elected, certainly to this assembly, and if I'm not mistaken, to any legislature across the country, Madam Speaker. I think it only right, especially given where we are right now, that it would be something that we would focus on and celebrate.

Of course, the final bill that was brought forward by my colleague from York South–Weston: Somali Heritage Week. I'm not sure, but I'm fairly certain that the member is also the first Somali Canadian elected to this Legislature. If I'm wrong, I apologize, but I'm fairly certain. I'm uncertain about nationwide, but I know he's a trailblazer here, and I've certainly appreciated working with both him and the member for Parkdale–High Park, and of course the deputy whip and the member for Mississauga Centre.

It is something that we said that we would do. I do appreciate the patience and the tolerance of the House from March right through to July. It is a big deal when we are unable to deal with private members' business. It is something that members put a lot of time and effort into. They are approached by members of their community. They work very hard on that. They develop support, not only amongst their caucus, but amongst members on both sides of the House. And it is one of the most important things, I think, that we as legislators can do, and that is hear debate and focus on private members' business. We were very concerned, and this motion allows us to bring that forward.

I will be outlining and tabling later on today some further measures which I hope the House will consider with respect to advancing private members' business, but I haven't tabled that yet, so hopefully we will do that later today and the House can have a bit more fulsome debate on the other measures that we're proposing in order for us to catch up.

So with that, Madam Speaker, I'll just say again, thank you to all members of the House for your patience, thank you for allowing us to proceed as quickly as we needed to, and thank you again to all of my colleagues. I know it's not necessarily my place to be proud of how a Legislature has worked, but the way this Legislature has conducted itself, the way the members have conducted themselves—I've said it a number of times—the speed at which we moved did not necessarily mean that the opposition was not vigorous in debating with the government and forcing

the government's hand on a number of things when bills were introduced in the House. Just the opposite: They did the work that the people of the province of Ontario expect an opposition to do. They held the government accountable but allowed us to move very quickly in a pandemic. This allows us to start moving on.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'll yield the floor to my colleagues opposite.

1400

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm not going to take a lot of time because, like the government House leader, I think we would like to get on debating these private members' bills. As you know, Speaker—you've been here a long time—it is hard to get a bill to third reading once you've actually got your bill passed at second reading. So any time we have an opportunity to be able to advance private members' bills on to third reading for a final vote and, hopefully, passage, I think it's something that we should all be striving for. Unfortunately, it's a pretty rare thing around this Legislature. I don't throw this entirely on the government's doorstep; it was certainly the same with previous governments that were here. In the 30 years that I've been here, it has been sort of the practice that if you can get two, three or four of these things passed in one session, that was pretty good.

I hope the government, in indicating what I just heard from the government House leader—because we know that the government plans on making some changes to the standing orders to deal with private members' bills—that that would be a signal to actually find a way so that members can bring those matters here, have them not only debated and passed at second reading, but actually get them passed at third reading and hopefully come into law.

I would be remiss if I didn't do my job as an opposition member and as the official opposition House leader to point out that I heard the government House leader bemoan the fact that we weren't doing private members' bills this afternoon, but it was his decision. There's no reason why this House, while we were sitting—after June, we sat three days a week: Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, I think, in July; I think it was Tuesdays and Wednesdays in June and then we did Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday in July and August—couldn't have had private members' bills. There were all kinds of opportunities to do that, either by having our regular Thursday that deals with private members' bills—dealt with at that time—or we could have had some sort of agreement in order to be able to have some sort of private members' debate within the time we had.

He was right; there was a lot of legislation that the government brought through that we didn't hold up for very long because, quite frankly, we were, on all sides of the House—as well as all citizens in Ontario—saying, "Listen, what can we do in order to try to deal with this pandemic?" Some of the things the government did were right, and we supported those things and allowed quick passage. Some things, like the so-called education plan,

we don't agree with. Quite frankly, we think that's one of the major problems that we're going to be facing this fall as a result of the government's decision.

But I also have to say—and I'm not going to go very much longer—that not only did we not allow members to have private members' bills, but we didn't have opposition days. None of those happened after the month of May—actually, after the beginning of June. And the way the committees were functioning didn't allow for the oversight to happen that needs to happen in this House.

I want to say up front, I accept the results of the last election. I don't know if the government does, but I do. They won. They have a majority. They have the right to bring the agenda to the House and they have an obligation to pass it. I understand that. But there's a check and balance in our system and there's oversight that the government did not allow. Not having private members' bills; not having opposition days; committee business being done in camera, not in full public view; in some cases, like the select committee on emergency orders, not being able to write a dissenting report—those are all things that point to a government that did not want scrutiny. I think in a pandemic, the public needs to know exactly what's going on, and they've got to know that the government is holding itself accountable for its decisions. When a government takes away the tools of the Legislature that create that opportunity for oversight, I think it says a lot about the government in the sense of where it's coming from.

I just want to say to the government across the way, I hope what the government House leader is trying to signal is that the government is going to change its ways this fall. If they do, we welcome that; we truly do. We think committees should function in a way that allows proper oversight to happen. The government has to allow review of public appointments in a way that it hasn't done since it's been elected. Committees have to have the ability at public accounts to be able to do the work that needs to be done in order to keep a public eye on the books—that's why they call it "public accounts"—and on issues within the finances of Ontario that need to be looked at, especially at a time when we're in a middle of a pandemic. We accept and understand that the government is going to run a higher deficit as a result of the pandemic—mind you, they're looking at the federal government to pay the bill and they put in a little bit after, but that's for another time and debate—but there has to be clear transparency in everything that the government does.

The last thing I just want to say to the government House leader is, I understand from what I was told by our whip today that the agreement—not an agreement, but what the government has decided to do on its own. There is no agreement here, just what they're going to do. They're going to call the first private member's bill, which is their right: Mr. Rasheed's bill, which is fine. It's a bill that I think we can all understand is important and needs to be dealt with. But apparently it's going to be the only bill dealt with today.

I'm hoping that the government, in its way forward to try to find a way to work with the opposition, will say,

“Okay, when we next deal with a private member’s bill”—that it will happen, that it’s not that we’re only going to get one private member’s bill passed, that we actually pass all four, but that the next bill be one from the official opposition. Then they can do another one from the government, then do another one from the official opposition. I think that would be a good way for the government to signal that it’s trying to find a way to be able to work its way forward and undo some of the relationship that got broke this summer as a result of what some of the government decisions were.

That’s all the time I’m going to take. I’m going to put my best foot forward and hope that what the government is trying to signal is that they are going to change the way that they do things. If they do, I think that’s a good thing. Only time will tell, Madam Speaker.

With that, I cede the floor.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: I am very happy to be back in the House with my colleagues from my caucus, as well as my friends across the aisle. It seems like just yesterday that we returned for our summer sitting back in July. During that time, our government passed crucial legislation that no doubt helped Ontario weather the storm of COVID-19. More importantly, the work we accomplished positioned Ontario for a strong economic recovery as restrictions lessened and more and more people returned to work and school.

Slowly but surely, Ontario is returning to something more familiar. By continuing to work together and by abiding by our public health protocols, we are ensuring a bright future for our province which prioritizes the health, well-being and economic prosperity of our people. I am very excited to be back today and to share stories from our ridings with colleagues, share best practices and practise that much-needed peer-to-peer socialization. I missed you guys.

Today has a very back-to-school feeling: members wearing their crisp new suits and ties, proudly carrying their briefcases, wearing colourful homemade masks, sporting those much-coveted new haircuts—and, yes, ladies, it feels good to have that mani and pedi done once again.

Before I begin my speech on government notice of motion 87, I would like to share with all of you a story which moved me this morning. Speaker, this morning I heard the owner of Tom’s Place, Tom Mihalik, speak on the radio. Tom’s Place is a men’s custom tailor store located just a stroll away from here, in Kensington Market. He was talking about reopening his store and what a positive experience it has been so far for his staff and customers.

He also talked about his roots and his beginnings in Canada. Tom’s father, William Mihalik, first came to Canada in 1956, after the Hungarian revolution. Like many immigrants, William had little money, but he did possess a tremendous work ethic. He settled in Kensington Market and opened a store in 1958, selling second-hand

clothing. He was joined by his family, including his son Tom, when Tom was age 12. The rest is history.

His story really resonated with me this morning, especially when Tom said that Canada is the best country in the world, full of opportunities and limitless potential. I couldn’t help but agree with Tom wholeheartedly.

Another thing that Tom said this morning moved me very profoundly as I was driving in. He was talking about having the opportunity to meet with the Right Honourable Jean Chrétien and his wife, Aline, who recently passed away. In that context, he said that we have great, passionate, hard-working and proud politicians in Canada, motivated to make Canada the best country it can possibly be. Regardless of if they are Conservative, Liberal, NDP, Green, they work hard for our country, and we are fortunate to have them, and Canadians owe them a debt of gratitude.

1410

Speaker, it is not very often that you hear people publicly praising politicians. I was very moved to hear those kind words, such a profound contrast to what I have sadly become accustomed to hearing.

Dear colleagues, on behalf of Tom, I want to express my deep and profound gratitude to each and every one of you for your hard work, for your tireless efforts in helping your constituents during this pandemic, for the courage of your convictions, and for all the sacrifices you make each and every day to make Ontario a home we can all be proud of.

With that, I’d like to lead the debate on government notice of motion 87, advancing Bills 131, 154, 180 and 182 to third reading. I am very humbled that my own private member’s bill, 182, is being advanced, and I have to say that I find myself in great company with the members from Mississauga East–Cooksville, Parkdale–High Park and York South–Weston.

Je prends la parole aujourd’hui pour parler avec fierté de mon projet de loi d’initiative parlementaire, le projet de loi 182. Le projet de loi 182 modifie la Loi de 2001 sur l’emblème franco-ontarien pour reconnaître le drapeau franco-ontarien comme emblème officiel de la province de l’Ontario. Par cette loi, le drapeau franco-ontarien sera reconnu à la fois comme l’emblème de la communauté francophone et comme l’emblème de la province elle-même. Et, madame la Présidente, comme nous l’avons appris à maintes reprises tout au long de l’histoire, les symboles comptent.

Cette loi symbolise les grandes avancées de notre gouvernement pour promouvoir et bâtir des relations encore meilleures avec la communauté franco-ontarienne. En reconnaissant le symbole des francophones de l’Ontario, nous faisons plus que simplement pointer un drapeau et dire qu’il a une légitimité provinciale. Il illustre notre engagement à reconnaître la longue et riche histoire que vivent les francophones dans notre pays et qui remonte à 400 ans. Il démontre la place des Franco-Ontariens dans la mosaïque culturelle diversifiée de l’Ontario, mais encore plus profondément en tant qu’une des nations fondatrices du Canada.

In my time as member of provincial Parliament for Mississauga Centre, I have enjoyed a strong and robust relationship with the francophone community. Yet this relationship, I feel, has grown stronger and has been even more fulfilling during the pandemic we have all come to find ourselves in. COVID-19 has undoubtedly presented immense challenges to the people of Ontario. Life, as we know, has been turned upside down.

It brought forward new challenges and barriers to vulnerable members of our community. Residents in my riding who are elderly or immunocompromised have had to deal with a new and difficult reality. They had to be exceedingly stringent in their interactions with the outside world.

But even with challenge and adversity, Ontario's spirit is a light that shines bright and cannot be dimmed. Many community groups in my riding stepped up to ensure that our most vulnerable, our neighbours, were taken care of and had what they needed to get through this difficult time. It was not only the right thing to do; it was the Canadian thing to do.

I had the pleasure of working with groups and businesses such as the HopeSisters, GTA Outreach, United Together, Biogen, New Genesis, Toronto Micro-Electronics, Pasta it Forward, Feed it Forward, Conquer COVID-19, Classic Nails and Beauty Supply, Polish Canadian Women's Federation, Gold Collagen, the Taiwanese association of Canada and many others.

Besides these fantastic groups made up of inspiring people, I was able to work with a group whose mission was to serve francophones in and around the greater Toronto area.

Le Centre francophone du Grand Toronto est un organisme local à but non lucratif qui sert de porte d'entrée pour les francophones qui vivent actuellement dans la région du grand Toronto et ceux qui viennent s'établir ici d'ailleurs. Grâce à une gamme diversifiée de services, le centre répond aux besoins de la communauté francophone de la région du grand Toronto avec l'intention de contribuer à son bien-être général.

L'immensité des services offerts par le centre est vraiment remarquable. Ce sont des groupes de la société civile comme eux qui font le travail méconnu de faire en sorte que les communautés francophones de la province soient saines et prospères.

Le Centre francophone du Grand Toronto offre tout : des services de soins de santé et de counseling en santé mentale aux services qui aident à la fois à l'établissement et à l'intégration de nouveaux francophones. Il fournit également des services qui aident les francophones de la région du grand Toronto, y compris Mississauga, à se connecter avec des possibilités d'emploi pertinentes.

Mais pendant la pandémie de la COVID-19, le Centre francophone du Grand Toronto a ajouté un autre service à cette liste : s'assurer que les personnes vulnérables de tous horizons avaient ce dont elles avaient besoin pour surmonter la tempête. J'ai pu rejoindre mon amie, directrice générale du Centre francophone du Grand Toronto, Florence Ngenzebuhoro, pour de nombreuses

initiatives de sensibilisation au cours des derniers mois. Ensemble, nous avons livré des repas aux personnes âgées, confinées chez elles pour leur propre sécurité et leur bien-être.

In the process, Florence and I, with our teams, gave more than just meals. We strived to give a feeling of community and belonging to people who no doubt felt the pain of loneliness and isolation.

Social isolation and the loneliness that accompanies it has been another area of concern for these community groups during the pandemic. Leveraging their incredible ability to reconnect people, they found even more ways of helping our most vulnerable. I could not thank them enough for what they have done. Truly, it is our unsung community heroes and our can-do Ontario spirit that will get us to the other side of this pandemic.

I had the pleasure of collaborating alongside Florence and the Centre Francophone du Grand Toronto with other local francophone groups—for example, the Centres d'Accueil Héritage—to ensure local residents had much-needed personal protective equipment and essential health supplies. In fact, our work with Centres d'Accueil Héritage was done in conjunction with a colleague of mine across the floor, the member from Spadina–Fort York. As our Premier said, there is no blue team, no orange team and no red team; there is only one team: team Ontario and team Canada.

This is also true in the spirit of the other private members' bills being brought forward in today's government notice of motion.

First, Bill 154, the Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day Act, put forth by my colleague from Mississauga East–Cooksville: It's an important piece of legislation that puts much-needed attention on an issue facing Ontario students. This act marks the third Friday of June in each year as Stop Cyberbullying Day in Ontario.

Bullying is a difficult stressor that imposes not only an immense physical health cost on its victims, but an immense emotional and mental health cost, too. As the government that promised from the beginning of its mandate to prioritize the mental health of Ontarians in the same way that we prioritize physical health, cyberbullying is something that must be addressed. I am extremely proud of the funding that our government has committed to the mental health of Ontarians, ensuring that there are numerous resources and tools available to each and every person who needs them.

Initiatives such as this bill put forward by my colleague are important for ensuring that the conversation surrounding mental health is always on the public mind and to finally end the stigma.

Our students must know that supports and help are always available if they find themselves to be victims of cyberbullying—or bullying of any kind, for that matter. They can access, for example, connexontario.ca or the Kids Help Phone line, at 1-800-668-6868.

Another bill that is being brought forward today is Bill 180, by my colleague the member from York South–Weston. It marks June 25 to July 1 as Somali Heritage

Week, whereby the province of Ontario recognizes the numerous contributions Somali Ontarians have made to our economy, our cultural institutions and our society at large.

Furthermore, Bill 131, put forward by the member from Parkdale–High Park, marks the month of July each year as Tibetan Heritage Month, recognizing the social, political and economic contributions of the Tibetan community to both Ontario and Canada. I would also like to congratulate the member for being the first Canadian of Tibetan origin to be elected into office.

July was chosen due to the significance of this month to the Tibetan community, with July 6 being the birthday of His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, who is also an honorary Canadian citizen.

Both of these aforementioned bills are quite interconnected in that they look to strengthen the diverse cultural mosaic that is Ontarian society today. Whether it is the Franco-Ontarian community, the Somali Ontarian community, or the Tibetan Ontarian community, each grouping of people holds a unique part in our equitable and diverse cultural landscape. Each grouping of people has had their own countless contributions to make our province the world-class place that it is today to live, work, worship and play.

1420

Legislation like these two bills are both symbolic and important. They are an affirmation of the belonging of their respective communities, bringing to light and recognizing their respective accomplishments as well as serving as a reminder that the components of Ontarian civil society are incredibly diverse and international.

I would like to conclude by saying that I'm proud of all my colleagues in the House who chose to create a bill that spoke to both their own identity as well as stakeholders in their constituencies. It is no doubt a difficult task, but as elected representatives I believe we can all agree that the feeling of your work being passed is unmatched. I know that much bipartisan co-operation went into making each and every one of these bills. That sort of spirit, I hope, is something that continues here in the House as we settle back in to do the great work for the people of Ontario over the next several months.

Thank you to everyone, especially those who helped to make my own bill, Bill 182, a reality. It simply could not have been done without your help, support and encouragement.

I am looking forward to being back to represent the residents of Mississauga Centre and help our government steer the province forward as we begin our road to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. It's great to be back, because we are all better together, two metres apart.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: Just to let everybody know at home, we're wearing masks but we're able to take them off when we're speaking here in the Legislature.

We often hear about different topics being grouped together in omnibus bills in government, but this is really a collaborative effort today that we're working on, advancing four bills and bringing them forward for debate for final reading, third reading. Bills 131, 154, 180, and 182—a little bit diverse topics, but as my colleague just mentioned they really, each of them, highlight our diversity and our wanting to make Ontario a better place to live, work and play.

Of course, I want to start with creating a francophone emblem in Ontario. We already have a francophone flag pour les Franco-Ontariens et les Franco-Ontariennes, for the Franco-Ontarians. It is an interesting flag because it takes into account the Ontarian trillium flower and the Quebec fleur-de-lys, and the colours are a bright green and white. It's used, and we do the flag-raising here at Queen's Park. In French they say, "lever le drapeau." We do it on September 25, which is Franco-Ontarian Day.

We know that we have a very strong Franco-Ontarian heritage here in Ontario, of course, just like in other jurisdictions across Canada. We have the Franco-Ontarians who were born in Ontario, we have the Quebecois—or from other jurisdictions in Canada—and French-speaking individuals who have moved to Ontario. We have, of course, from Europe and many francophone regions all over Africa—people move and relocate to Ontario as well.

Then we have what we call the francophiles. I consider myself a francophile, Madam Speaker, which is somebody who really makes an effort to speak French whenever possible, to improve their French as much as possible and to encourage other people to learn French, to improve their French and to learn about all the different fantastic French cultures. Across the world, we have different French accents, just like in English, and different cultures and backgrounds of people who consider themselves Franco-Ontarian.

The member put forward a private member's bill back in the fall which I was pleased to support. The idea was to have an emblem, which we could wear on a pin or for other celebrations of different kinds, of the Franco-Ontarian flag put into this emblem. What I am hoping to see very soon, and I've been talking to my staff about it, is to have an emoji that we can all use on social media of the francophone emblem.

We have a vast network, as I spoke about, in different areas, and I want to highlight a few of the francophone communities that I hope will embrace this francophone emblem that we're promoting here.

First, we have Faouzi Metouilli from the Muslim Moroccan association, which I try to work with very often. I've known Faouzi since right after I was elected, in fact. He works very collaboratively with the Moroccan Jewish community here in Toronto. So it's a really wonderful thing to see.

I'm hoping that we can possibly, with all-party support, some day move forward on having a Moroccan heritage week or month here in the Legislature, because these types of special weeks and special months and special days

remind the people who practise that culture or come from that background of their heritage, their background and their ancestors, but it also gives everybody else an opportunity to learn about all the different cultures and food and celebrations and clothing and costumes and things like that.

So it's a real honour for me, when I seen the Moroccan Muslim association working so collaboratively with the Moroccan Jewish association. Of course, Morocco is a very French-speaking country, and for many of the Moroccans, their first language is French. It again gives us francophiles an opportunity to speak in French.

I want to mention Carol Jolin from, as I call it, Mon Assemblée. It's the largest francophone organization here in Ontario, the AFO. I want to just quote him: "In the month of March, the month of the Francophonie, it is a strong gesture"—I'm quoting him, so I'm able to say députée—"by députée Kusendova. Symbols are important. Full recognition of the importance of the Franco-Ontarian flag is another sign demonstrating the evolution of the relationship between 'elected provincial officials' and the Franco-Ontarian population. It shows their respect for our community."

I want to thank Carol Jolin for all the work he does to remind us here in the Legislature what the francophone community is about, the importance of the francophone community, why we should support the Franco-Ontariens and Franco-Ontariennes here in Ontario, but also how important it is for economic activity for Ontario to have that connection with francophone communities in Europe and Africa and other parts of the world, to have that connection and that ability to have a population of skilled, educated Ontarians who are also able to work and converse in French.

I just want to mention a few other francophone things, Madam Speaker. We have a francophone theme song, which during my time in opposition we all supported here in the Legislature. It's called Notre Place and it's written by Paul Demers. When students were able to come and visit, when we had visitors prior to COVID-19 here at Queen's Park—and we all look forward to having visitors again soon—it was really one of the high points for the francophone students to sing Notre Place here at Queen's Park and to remind themselves and all of us of their pride in their French culture and background.

We do, obviously, have francophone schools here in Ontario. We actually have a serious problem, not just during COVID-19 and all of the efforts that we're making to keep our schools safe in terms of health care and medical concerns, but we do have a shortage of French-speaking teachers in Ontario. Even Quebec is having trouble finding enough French teachers.

I think I've said it before in the Legislature that even parents from south Asia and from non-French-speaking regions in the world who have moved to Ontario want their children to learn French. They think it's very important. They think it, like music, is something that really develops their children's education and job prospects and career prospects. But they also think that it's important for the

culture of their children to understand the French culture and heritage here in Ontario and Canada. They're very upset when they're unable to find French immersion programs for their children that are available. There are long waiting lists, and that's something that I look forward to us being able to solve in the future as a Legislature.

1430

I just want to speak a little bit about cyberbullying before my time is up. I want to just mention that we know we've spoken about it many, many times in the Legislature. There are special days to remind us about the dangers of cyberbullying. We speak about mental health concerns that can be exacerbated for anybody who is being bullied—of any type, whether it's cyberbullying or in person. We see it in our schools, and that's usually where we talk about it. We see it among students, that it's a new form of harassment.

We used to talk about the "pecking order." Kids are always fighting to be recognized, to be popular. There are two ways to elevate your feelings about yourself in this world. One is to put somebody else down, while the other is to do something that you're proud of, be successful and feel good about yourself. While we all want to encourage children and adults to feel good by doing something productive with their lives, not by somehow bullying or criticizing somebody else, it's a challenge. It's something that some people seem to naturally gravitate towards, bullying of different types.

Increasingly, we're hearing about it in the workplace. As elected officials, probably many of us have witnessed it either personally or online, on social media—different types of cyberbullying. I have an article right here in front of me and the title is, "Cyberbullying Expert Concerned over Teachers' Online Behaviour towards Education Minister." I think that most people in the room know what I'm talking about, but for those people at home, it got very personal and very nasty towards our education minister when he was just doing his very best to work with so many different moving parts to address the back-to-school protocol that our students, teachers and parents are all doing their best to understand and to make a big success.

Mental health experts recognize that it's important that the students do get back to some kind of in-person learning, either part-time or full-time. We all understand the challenges: different regional concerns, different topics and subjects, different age groups, special-needs children. These are all concerns, and we're all doing our best. These sorts of online and social media attacks on the education minister—he weathered the storm, obviously, very well, and kudos to him for being able to do that, but I think that there's a lesson to be learned in that, and the lesson is that it's not just children who engage in cyberbullying.

We all have to figure out how we're going to educate our workers and people who are at home on how they can have reasonable, mature dialogue without resorting to bully tactics, and how sometimes a very innocent comment can be so hurtful and so damaging, and that you don't know what somebody else is going through at a certain

point in their life. Your one little comment can be the straw that broke the proverbial camel's back and was too much for that person to bear. I would remind everybody that it's not just when you're sending off an email that might be controversial and you press "send," that maybe you should put it aside and reread it at a later time—but on social media, as well. People are just way too quick to press that button and post a comment that can be so negative, so hurtful and so mean-spirited.

I hope that we're going to see, with the passage of this bill, being able to create that education. The awareness can go a long way. We're all guilty sometimes, to try to make a joke. I am one to say that I'm fairly thick-skinned and that sometimes I might not recognize that other people may not be as much, but on the other hand, I believe that we don't want to be a humourless society. We don't want everybody to live in fear of every single word that comes out of their mouth, so we do our best to be understanding on both sides of the table.

The two other bills that we're packaging together here in a very collaborative effort are two from the government side—the cyberbullying and the Francophone emblem, of course—and two from the official opposition, the New Democrats, that two of their new members have put forward to recognize their cultural heritage. One is, as I mentioned earlier, a week to recognize Somali heritage. I was speaking to the member in the hall earlier this morning and congratulating him, and he's a very fine speaker here in the Legislature. You don't get to speak to people sometimes in other parties or across the aisle as often as you would like, but you certainly do get to know a little bit about people's background, and their personalities even sometimes shine through here in the Legislature. I look forward to celebrating the first Somali heritage week in Ontario with him. I'm sure there will be a lot of visitors to Queen's Park if COVID-19 will allow it. If not, we might have to tone it down the first time. It would be the first week of June, so I'm hopeful that we will be having visitors here at Queen's Park by the first week of June.

The fourth and final bill is to recognize Tibetan heritage.

These are two places that I myself have not visited. I don't think that at the end of my life I'll visit all the places I would like to visit, especially if this pandemic continues, but I think that there is a lot of rich heritage that we can learn about from each other and from the communities.

We're very fortunate to live in a fantastic area, here in the Toronto-GTA area, but the province of Ontario is increasingly becoming more and more multicultural. I think that we're a shining example to a lot of jurisdictions around the world about how we live, work and play together so well with so many different cultures and backgrounds. I'm looking forward to hearing about more work that's being done in terms of all of these different cultural communities and bringing all these sort of far-fetched private member's bills together to celebrate together so that we don't have to always do one culture or one religious holiday separately. How can we bring the

groups together? As I had mentioned before, the Muslim Moroccan association doing events all through the year with the Jewish Moroccan association—how we can build those bridges, all the different cultures and religions.

We have been following the news recently with Israel creating diplomatic relations with help from the US. So many countries, including Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Morocco, which I keep mentioning, are opening up a diplomatic relationship with Israel for the first time in recent history. This is just the way towards goodwill, towards peace. The world we know is a small place normally, with flights that we can get all over the place and the global economy. But COVID-19 has taught us that we do have borders, and it's going to be a challenge for us to visit all of those different places, so we're going to have to learn how to celebrate them here in Ontario.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I want to commend everybody whose bill is being passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate? Further debate?

Mr. Calandra has moved government notice of motion number 87 relating to Bill 154, Bill 182, Bill 131 and Bill 180. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

1440

STOP CYBERBULLYING IN ONTARIO DAY ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 SUR LA JOURNÉE POUR L'ÉLIMINATION DE LA CYBERINTIMIDATION EN ONTARIO

Mr. Rasheed moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 154, An Act to proclaim Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day / Projet de loi 154, Loi proclamant la Journée pour l'élimination de la cyberintimidation en Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Mr. Rasheed has moved third reading of Bill 154. The member for Mississauga East—Cooksville.

Mr. Kaled Rasheed: I rise today on my private member's Bill 154, Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day Act, 2019. Madam Speaker, this bill is very important to me and I will speak to its merits momentarily.

But first, I would like to take a moment to welcome everyone. I want to thank Ontario's front-line health care and essential service workers, who have been performing above and beyond for many, many months. This crisis has become a defining moment in our province's history. There are still many challenges ahead of us in the battle against COVID-19 and much work to do in our economic recovery efforts. The people of Ontario have been working harder than ever to support one another through this difficult time. We have shown one another that we are strongest when we work together or, as I always say, Madam Speaker, we are all in this together.

Now I'll just talk about my private member's bill, Bill 154. I tabled this bill last year with very clear intentions to raise awareness of the specific problem of cyberbullying in our communities and online spaces. We can all agree that life can get really busy, and these unprecedented times are no exception. It is easy to forget about things that we don't see or hear about on a day-to-day basis. This is why I am asking this province to set aside one day every year so we may all pause and remember that cyberbullying is a real problem and that there are significant resources and programs available to assist those who are struggling with cyberbullying. The third Friday of June in each year is proclaimed as Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day.

Cyberbullying consists of electronic communication that directly or indirectly causes, or is likely to cause, harm to another individual's physical or mental health and well-being. As my colleague mentioned, it can have very detrimental effects on one's health. I have seen this so many times that when we see individuals being bullied, whether it's online or whether it's physical, it breaks my heart—because somewhere these individuals who are being bullied don't deserve to be bullied. I hope that once this bill is passed and gets royal assent, we are able to provide individuals with information, we are able to go out and have this day to educate individuals out there that “Yes, you may be bullying someone. Again, whether it's physical or in an online space, just remember the impacts on that individual or the effects of what he or she may be experiencing because you are bullying.”

It's easy for someone sitting behind a screen saying things to individuals. Madam Speaker, they don't realize that even at such a young age our children, unfortunately—and it breaks my heart to say this—are committing suicide just because they are being bullied, and we have to stop this.

Once this bill passes, at least we can have—and I know one day is not enough, but at least it's a start, to have the conversation in our schools, in our workplaces; because all individuals here have to play their part in making sure that we are able stop this one day.

Madam Speaker, Ontario has seen an increase in cases of cyberbullying. Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day will increase awareness of the problem of cyberbullying and help lead to its prevention. That's really my goal. My hope is that we are able to achieve this thing. It will help give children and adults the tools they need to protect themselves from cyberbullying by encouraging discussion in schools and workplaces.

Overall, approximately one out of every five teenagers in the province has been the target of cyberbullying, and one out of every six has been a cyberbully at some point in their lifetime. I'm a father of four kids. My eldest is 12, and she just went into grade 7. At the beginning of this year, she said, “Papa, can I have a cellphone?” I said, “Why do you need a cellphone?” Somehow, she and my wife were able to convince me. Because she has to go to libraries for studies and everything, I said, “Okay, sure. You can get a cellphone, but it won't have a data plan, because I want to make sure that I have a little bit of

control of what you do on your cellphone.” So we got a cellphone.

As a father, I kept saying to my wife that we need to make sure that we are keeping an eye on her cellphone activities and make sure that she doesn't have all these social media accounts. But the next thing I know, she has a TikTok account set up, then Facebook, then Twitter. I said to her, “Why do you need all these accounts? You are in grade 6. You are 12 years old.” She said, “Oh, Papa, it's our way of communicating with friends.”

I said to my wife, “Sofiya, make sure that you're keeping a very close eye on what's going on on the social media platform.” Madam Speaker, I'm not usually right all the time, but this time I was right, because my wife showed me a picture of one of my daughter's friends who—on her picture, they had written the word “loser,” and that picture was going around on social media platforms.

The next day, I went to the school, and I said to the school administration, “Do you guys really know what's going on? There is an 11- or 12-year-old girl being bullied through the social media platforms. You need to educate children on the impact of having that picture and the word ‘loser’ written on it.” The school started to investigate, and at that point, I knew that we need to do something about it.

I made a personal commitment to myself that I'm going to make sure that I educate—education starts from home. I made a personal commitment to myself that I am going to make sure that I teach my children the impacts that cyberbullying or bullying in general can have on someone.

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I'm going to go to the adult side as well, because we see a lot of bullying happening in workplaces, but sometimes a strong kid will be fighting with some other kids in school, and you will see other kids making a video of the fight taking place, or they will be taking pictures, and then they will be posting it on different social media platforms, not realizing that the kid who unfortunately was getting the beating doesn't deserve to be out there bullied like this on a social media platform. A few years ago, Madam Speaker, I experienced a similar thing, and at that point I wondered why there is no such education for children out there to show them that we cannot have this kind of behaviour on social media platforms.

Truly, my hope is that we are able to educate our children by going to different schools and getting our front-line police officers to go out there. I spoke with many police officers in different regions and they gave me their commitment that they will make sure that, if this bill is passed, they are out there, especially on this day—the third Friday of June—talking to children, having conversations, educating them, to explain to them that these bullying tactics can have lifelong detrimental effects on individuals.

This doesn't start or stop just with children. Unfortunately, we see this a lot in workplaces as well. We see bullying happening in workplaces, and sometimes people literally don't even talk about it. We see that a lot of times

people are commenting on individuals' dress, or commenting on their work. Why do you have to publicly talk about someone else's life in a way where he or she doesn't even know what's happening? What I noticed, when I saw the picture on my daughter's cellphone, was that the individual who was actually being bullied was not even part of the conversation. All the kids were making fun of her and it was just really, really sad to see.

That's why I am saying that when we talk about cyberbullying and we start educating people, it has to start from somewhere. I hope that this day is going to help people to actually start having those serious conversations—that it's not just one of those days, where we just talk one day and that's it. The hope is that we continue to have conversations and continue to educate people.

At the same time, as I just said, when we look at adults, they do experience cyberbullying and it can negatively impact their productivity as well. A good friend of mine works for an organization and they have their sales quotas. Every year they get a sales quota. What happened was that one year he was not able to achieve his target, and he was bullied right at the workplace. I felt like it was workplace harassment. He literally had to take three months off. He was mentally disturbed just because there was so much pressure on him, but then people were saying a lot of negative things about him. He decided, after three months, to literally call it quits because he just couldn't take it anymore.

That's what I mean—it's not just children; it's adults who are having some really nasty conversations out there and not realizing that they're hurting someone. That's why sometimes, Madam Speaker, we see individuals committing suicide because of the toxic environment at times which they are in and not with their own—they don't want to be, but unfortunately, sometimes it just happens that they are part of the environment. Somehow, I am just hoping that we are able to stop this thing by at least starting to have the conversation on this day.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I encourage everyone to work together to make Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day a success and continue the work to reduce and prevent cyberbullying in Ontario and everywhere. As I said, I made a personal commitment to myself that I'm going to be out there talking about it. I hope that we, as individuals and as colleagues, also make sure that we are out there talking about it and educating others.

If we are able to save one life just because we were able to have a conversation or convince someone not to bully others, I think that would be a huge success.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate? The member for Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's very nice to see you in the Chair today, and to welcome everybody back to the Legislature as we begin our fall-winter session.

Speaker, I am pleased to be able to rise today to speak in support of Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day, which has come before us today for third reading. I'm proud to

represent the official opposition in my role as the critic for children's services.

I've spoken about bullying many times in this House before. We know the devastating effects of bullying of all forms on young people. Bullying can leave physical and emotional scars that impact someone's life for decades. Those who experience bullying often suffer from social anxiety, loneliness and low self-esteem as a result. They feel like their school or their workplace is unsafe, and they dread going. Bullying can also cause people to perform badly while they're at school or work.

Statistics show that 45% of Canadian workers report being bullied on the job, and the majority of them won't report it for fear of reprisal. Youth experience bullying every day in our schools and on our playgrounds as well. Research shows that one in three young people reports being bullied at school. Further, about half of Canadian parents have reported that their child is a victim of bullying. And when it comes to cyberbullying, as many as one in five teens say that they have experienced it.

Kids should be able to feel a reprieve from their bullies when they leave school and when they get into the safety of their homes, but instead, there is no escape. Social media has changed this. Access to technology in our homes has done a lot of good, absolutely, but we have seen that it has given bullies another way to reach their victims. This creates even more anxiety, when even the home is not safe from bullies.

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Cyberbullying is often more harsh because bullies are empowered to say things without seeing the reaction of their victims. It is also more harsh because bullies can be anonymous. When they think that they won't get caught, they see there is an extra opportunity. We know, as we watch our own social media accounts, that the keyboard folks are sitting there in the background and have a lot to say that they typically wouldn't say to someone's face. There is less empathy when you're behind a computer screen. Bullies feel that they can harass their victims with no consequence, and they do it without seeing the damage that they're doing.

The risk of increased cyberbullying is now that much higher during COVID-19, as many young people are relying on their devices and social media for even more school and socialization. Young people don't often share that they're being cyberbullied because they're afraid of their devices being taken away, as we heard from the member for Mississauga East–Cooksville. Or they're afraid of the reaction; they're afraid of what their parents are going to say when they had to work so hard to get that technology and now to have to face cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is a real challenge because it occurs at our home and out of the view of our parents and our teachers. This bill proposes a Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day which, as I said, I am pleased and happy to be able to support. But it cannot be the end of this conversation. This private member's bill from the Conservatives has to be the start of a more ambitious plan to tackle cyberbullying. We already have a Bullying Awareness and

Prevention Week every November under the Education Act. We have Pink Shirt Day every February to raise awareness. So what we really need, after this bill, is a real strategy to tackle bullying and cyberbullying.

We know that bullying and cyberbullying thrive and are the most damaging when young people don't have the supports that they need. We need this government to make sure that young people feel safe and included at school. We need more adults in the classroom to ensure that students are supported. We need to make sure that kids get the one-on-one attention of a teacher to let them know what's happening to them, or if they feel frustrated or feel lost: more teachers in the classroom, more adult supports in the schools. We need to make sure that they can turn to a guidance counsellor or another caring or trusting adult.

When these people are cut from our classrooms, students have nowhere to turn and they act out. Students with special needs are often victims. We hear about it in our constituency office quite frequently. I know of an example from my riding where a special needs student was bullied due to having Tourette's syndrome. Kids in the school were picking on him, were bullying him. It got so bad that they actually had to pull that kid from school. That was the parents' decision: to pull the child from school because the administrators didn't have the resources to be able to deal with this. That's just totally wrong. No parent should have to choose between their child's mental stability and their education. This is where we need adults in the classroom. This is where we need true measures to fight bullying in our school system.

Education needs to be a right for every kid in Ontario. So is the freedom from violence at school. Without enough adults in the classroom, all of those measures come at risk, as we've just heard. This is what happens when we have a government that makes cuts to our school system, as they did before COVID-19. We have fewer adults and less support. Victims of bullying are left to fend for themselves because they don't have enough caring, trusting adults with enough time on their hands to be able to give them that one-on-one support. We need more opportunities for young people to report that they're being bullied online and to get actual help. Safe reporting is critical. If young people don't feel safe reporting their cyberbullying, then they won't report it and they will continue to fly under the radar.

We need more mental health resources for young people in schools. This is a no-brainer for tackling this issue. This should be a number one priority, mental health supports. We need to make sure that children have access to safe mental health supports so that they can manage their anxiety that comes from bullying. And the bullies might need some mental health support, also, to get to the root of why they're acting out and hurting their peers. Mental health supports for the bullies—let's help these kids. Let's find out what's going on in their minds, that they're acting out and hurting other folks.

We need more opportunities for teachers to be able to learn best practices for bullying prevention. Teachers and other education workers are in a unique position to help

end bullying and cyberbullying. They spend most of their time with our children, and they develop positive relationships with them as they teach. We should take advantage of this valuable resource.

Some of the responsibility for some of this should fall on our social media companies. What are the social media tech companies doing to help curb cyberbullying? As we heard from the member from Mississauga East-Cooksville, TikTok, Facebook, Twitter—these are all measures and social media platforms that our children are spending time on. I've scrolled through TikTok, and I can't even tell you how many times I've come across a young person who says, "I don't know why I'm being picked on. I don't know why I don't have any friends. I don't know why people are telling me I'm fat. I don't know why they're telling me they don't like my hair." These are young people who are reaching out within a platform that is, first of all, not even safe for them to be on, and we know this is happening.

How is it that we can have these social media platforms that can't pick up on these keywords to say, "This is bullying. This is hate. This is not right." We can say, "Hey, Google," and they hear everything that we're saying and know exactly what's happening. These networks should be able to pick up keywords and key phrases to just shut it down immediately. Make them responsible for some of this action that is happening within our youth. They have no problem making millions of dollars off of their users, but they don't do enough to root out the main cause and abusive behaviour that is happening on their platforms. We need them to be partners in this, to tackle this problem. We need a strategy to engage with these companies on these important issues. We need to make sure that they're held responsible, that they have a thought and a care about the young people their platforms are serving.

As I said, I'm glad to support this bill, but I urge the government to do the work required and get serious about tackling cyberbullying and provide the funding needed to complete that work, because, as we know, private members' bills, which are what's happening today, have no funding attached to them. So we're making a day to say anti-cyberbullying, but we're not putting any strategies or any measures behind it to actually root out the problem. We're just spinning wheels. We're not solving anything; we're just making a warm and fuzzy day when people can stand up and say that they're against cyberbullying. There are no concrete actions to ensure that we're doing just that.

My city of Hamilton, Speaker, has definitely seen some devastating effects of bullying on young people. Last year, Devan Selvey, a 14-year-old, died at the hands of his bullies at school. October 7 is the one-year anniversary of his death. My heart goes out to Devan's family, his friends and his community. As I've said in this House many times before, no one should have to experience this, and no young person should be tormented at school or at home when they're online. All of this trauma is preventable. The effects on his peers are still being felt. Speaker, they're still feeling the impact of his death at school.

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Families in my riding and across the city are fed up with bullying and the inaction they're seeing from this

government. Parents and community members are taking up the challenges themselves. That's what happens when governments are not responsive. There are groups in Hamilton that have been created to build awareness of bullying and provide support. That's a keyword there: providing supports. These are regular parents and concerned community members, sick of waiting for action to be taken—groups like 999th Legion for Child Rights or Angels Of Awareness, or grassroots events called Enough Is Enough. Let's stop senseless violence—which I will actually be speaking to in my community later this month.

Parents are also planning demonstrations at local schools to ask for a replacement of the administration, because they don't believe bullying is being treated as a priority.

I'd like to take a moment to speak to those parents and to those families who are coming forward for this demonstration: We can't fight hate with hate. We have to make sure we're mindful of our words, because the young people who are listening are already so traumatized. They have been through so much in that community, and now they're dealing with COVID and everything else, and the anniversary coming up with Devan. Let's be thoughtful. Let's find words of positivity and encouragement to make sure that's how we're leading in our community. It is an important message, and I didn't want to miss the opportunity of being able to say that.

I support all of these parents in their advocacy. They know something is wrong and they don't see the political will to fix it. If I were to show them this bill, they would ask me, "Where's the ambition? Where's the guts? Where are the action items to actually fix cyberbullying, to actually fix bullying in our schools?" They're not going to find them in this bill. They're going to find a day to talk about it. People are tired of talking about it. Kids are dying. We know that kids die at suicide rates much higher than they should be. They're not going to find any of those action items inside this bill. They're not going to find the resources to tackle the issue, and they're going to be angry.

Schools need tools and resources to manage bullying and cyberbullying. If it is the government's responsibility to ensure they can handle these important issues and keep young people safe, then they need to do it with tangible efforts. They need to put in tangible legislation, funding dollars to mental health, funding dollars to ensure that we do have enough adults in a classroom.

We can do better, Speaker. Like I said, I'm happy this bill is passing today, that we're going to have another day to talk about bullying, regardless of the form. I think it's important that our communities hear us talking about it, but I think it's more important that our communities actually see the funding, the tools, the necessary tangible assets that they can grab on to, that they can utilize and implement in their homes.

I think it's important that we really do find those measures and strategies to be able to talk to our social media techs. Where's their responsibility? How are they being part of the solution? Instead of just creating the problem—they've created a platform for the problem, but

they haven't created any solutions to make sure that we're keeping our youth safe.

This is a good start, but I'm hoping that the government will bring forward a bill that truly tackles bullying and cyberbullying within our communities, within our province, to ensure that our kids have a healthy foundation, and that when they go home at the end of the day they can find that peacefulness and they can find that safe zone within their own homes.

Thank you for the opportunity to be able to speak to this bill today. Thank you to the government for bringing forward these four bills that truly will make a difference in all of our communities.

I'm just pleased to be back and pleased to have the opportunity to stand in my space and to speak on behalf of the people of Hamilton Mountain.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I'm rising today in support of Bill 154, an important bill, a bill, as has been mentioned before, that maybe doesn't go far enough, but it's a start.

We know that being the victim of bullying and harassment can seriously harm a young person's ability to learn, to study, and to lead a healthy and fulfilling life. Bullying has no place in inclusive school communities, and it is critical that it is addressed in all of its forms to ensure that we are building a vibrant and welcoming Ontario for all. Because schools are where our kids develop their potential, and being bullied doesn't allow this potential to develop. It has a negative impact on development, in fact.

As our kids spend more and more time online, it has become more and more important that we focus on the digital forms of bullying, where anonymity, 24/7 access and large social audiences can make the impact of bullying all the more severe.

As a mother of four and as a former school trustee, cyberbullying is an issue that I have always cared about. Our children are facing this new form of bullying that can strike and multiply at an extremely rapid pace, and unfortunately it is all too real, as I happen to have first-hand knowledge of such abuse. Just like the member for Mississauga East–Cooksville, I too have four children and I have experienced the same kind of stories that he has explained. That's why I want to support Bill 154 to proclaim a special day to raise awareness.

A 2014 analysis from Public Safety Canada found that, on average, 21% of young people have experienced cyberbullying.

Nous savons tous que les jeunes sont vulnérables face à ce genre de comportement et qu'ils ne sont pas nécessairement outillés pour faire face à ces attaques.

Surveyed students who have experienced cyberbullying reported poorer health outcomes, school failure and increased rates of depression and anxiety.

In addition, our most vulnerable Ontarians experience these consequences on a disproportionately higher level. It is deeply important that legislators are made aware of the harms caused by cyberbullying and the number of young Ontarians who regularly experience it.

No one can deny that cyberbullying has devastating effects on mental health, and this can be overwhelmingly difficult when combined with the current pandemic. We cannot ignore the added mental health strain that our youth are experiencing right now. They need to know that we hear them and that we are here to support them.

Bill 154 is a helpful symbol that cyberbullying won't be tolerated in Ontario, and that we are committed to improving awareness and facilitating dialogue on this important issue. While this is a welcome first step, it doesn't replace the need for education and knowledge-sharing on cyberbullying through the student curriculum.

Le harcèlement par Internet est un sérieux problème dont on devrait parler au niveau élémentaire, car il faut reconnaître que de nos jours les enfants ont accès à des outils électroniques de plus en plus jeunes et ils y sont donc exposés de plus en plus jeunes. Il est donc de notre devoir de les aider à développer une habileté pour pouvoir se défendre, mais surtout d'empêcher ce genre de comportement de se développer dès le jeune âge, car tout commence sur les bancs d'école.

We have an opportunity to ensure every student learns about the impact of cyberbullying and the resources available to those needing support. We don't need to stop at recognition; we can push for education and direct impact. Let's all commit to building on this momentum to ensure that we are addressing bullying in the many ways it impacts Ontarians and that we are working together to build a more inclusive, respectful and healthy Ontario for all.

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The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Dave Smith: On Bill 154, An Act to proclaim Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day, it has been said a couple of times already, and it is true: It's a first step in addressing cyberbullying.

I'm 50. For some of you that will come as a surprise. Some of you may think I'm a little bit younger than that. Many of you will think I'm actually older than that. Bullying is something that we have seen throughout our history. The difference now, though, is there is a significant change in the approach to it.

When I was a kid growing up, if you were being bullied, it was at school, at the arena or downtown, and it was a very limited time period that it occurred. Now it may have happened on multiple days and it may be something that occurred multiple times, but the bullying act itself was something that was for a short period of time and you could find refuge. You could leave. You could go to another room, you could go to a different area; you could remove yourself from the situation and you got a little bit of refuge from it.

With cyberbullying, though, it's no longer that individual or couple of individuals coming up to you and physically intimidating you or embarrassing you. It's done online, and it exists forever. That record of the bullying is there for all eternity. As long as the Internet exists, that record of you being bullied is there. Those things that are

being said about you, all of those hurtful things, are there and they will be there in perpetuity. It means that you are victimized over and over and over again.

There is a great website, iPredator.co. It has been designed and set up specifically to help families, to help with bullying and with predatory behaviour towards children. There are a lot of different things in there that give a lot of good ideas on things that you can do. Throughout this speech, I'm going to have number of quotes from it. One in particular is from Michael Nuccitelli, who wrote this in 2014: "Not to say that pre-information age bullied children were not traumatized, but information age cyberbullied children are relentlessly tormented 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year." That's what the Internet has done: It has turned that act that may have been 10 or 15 minutes into something that lasts 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

I've got a pretty common name. My name is Dave Smith. What was interesting when I first got elected, or prior to getting elected, was when I was trying to find websites that I could use to promote me. With a name like Dave Smith, obviously there are going to be a lot of people out there who have it. I've got a Twitter account, but not just "@DaveSmith"; I had to add something to it. My website is not just davesmith.com, I had to add something to it.

If you look up "DaveSmithSucks.com," somebody actually bought that. It's for sale right now on the Internet. You can go out and buy DaveSmithSucks.com and you can say bad things about me, and I have no way of stopping that. This is something that we're seeing now. Websites are being created solely to attack people's character and break them down. That's something that never existed when I grew up as a kid. Obviously, the Internet didn't exist when I grew up as a kid. But the whole thought process that you would do something that would last forever, that could be searched by anyone, to attack people, just didn't exist when I was growing up.

When you look at what kids are facing today, it's a very different world that way. I'm going to quote again from iPredator: "Classic bullying pales in comparison to cyberbullying when the goal is causing the target to experience a sudden loss of reputation, self-worth and dignity via social media and technology." It's an attack on the individual that way. You're trying to destroy them and you're doing it 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

On this website, when it talks about cyberbullying in particular, they have compiled 42 different types of cyberbullying. When you think about physical bullying, there is the name calling. There might be some physical activity, where they are pushing you or hitting you. There is probably a half dozen different ways that you can bully someone physically when you come and see them.

Online, there are bash boards. Those are boards that are set up so that people can go on and make negative comments and attack people and share experiences that way. It's not that it is an individual who set it up to attack one person; it's a whole conglomerate of people who have gotten together and decided the most effective way to use

their time is to band together to attack a whole bunch of other people.

Blogobullying: It's very similar to a website. You create a blog and on your blog you ask people to join in, and you attack someone's character the whole time through it.

Cyberbullying by proxy: You reach out to others and you ask them to engage in that bullying behaviour as well. You co-opt others into attacking your target for you.

Cyberstalking—like any other type of stalking, where you're following someone or you're intimidating them, except it's all done online.

Cyber drama: You create lies about someone and you create drama around them, and it goes on 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Cyber harassment: It is just as it sounds, harassing behaviour all being done on the Internet. I'm old enough and I have been involved in technology long enough that I have used a lot of the different tools prior to what we define now as social media. The one particular I can think of is ICQ. Some people who may be old enough to remember it will remember the notification when something came in to you. It was, "uh-oh." Imagine hearing that all day long, as people are sending you that type of harassing message: Uh-oh, uh-oh, uh-oh, uh-oh—constantly. They probably should have come up with a different notification for it.

Denigration: Used in both classic bullying and cyberbullying, denigration is a term describing "when cyberbullies send, post or publish cruel rumours, gossip" or false stories about a child.

Digital piracy inclusion: They steal images that you may have posted and they modify them to paint you in a bad light.

eIntimidation—intimidating using electronics means.

Exposure: I'm going to read the definition for it because I think it's a really good definition, the way they've described it. "Exposure is a cyberbullying tactic that includes the public display, posting or forwarding of personal communication, images or video by the cyberbully that is personal and private to the target child." They're sending it specifically to the child that they're trying to bully.

Flaming: I'm sure we've all heard of that. We've probably all experienced this as elected officials. You post something on social media and they attack your intelligence, they attack your integrity, they attack your whole reasoning for doing it, to defame you.

Happy slapping: "Happy slapping is a comparatively new type of cyberbullying that integrates the rapid increase of online videos with classic bullying." What they're doing is physically bullying someone. Their friend pulls out the camera on their phone. They record the whole bullying action, and then you relive it over and over and over again because they post it online. And then they use the e-intimidation to send you the links to it constantly, so you are constantly seeing yourself getting bullied by someone. They're combining both the classic bullying with the cyberbullying.

1530

Instant messaging attacks, interactive gaming harassment—this is one that I was really surprised to read as a way that somebody would attack you. You get onto a multi-player game, you're having fun playing it, and your cyberbully creates an account to play the game simply to attack you in the game, call you names, degrade you and bring you down. You go onto a game to play the game, to get away from things, to enjoy it. Cyberbullying has now taken that, and they're attacking you that way.

Micro-visual bullying: They're taking pictures, and they send them to you. But they're doing it in very small segments, so they're extending it over a period of time. You'll get a portion of the picture and another portion of the picture and another portion of the picture until you finally get the whole thing. They extend that anxiety over a much longer period of time.

Password theft, phishing—all common things. But here is one that, for a younger child, can be really devastating. Your cyberbully signs you up to porn sites, and you get pornographic images sent to you through your email, through your texts. Imagine what it would be like for an eight- or nine-year-old to grab their phone because they heard their message come in, that they have something being sent to them, and it is significantly pornographic imagery that's being sent to them by a bully.

Screen name mirroring and pseudonym stealth—very similar things where someone will create an account with a very, very similar name to yours and pretend to be you. They'll steal your image and put it as their profile image, and use that, then, to make you look bad because others will think it's actually you. You're probably sitting back—and it may not be the best thing to tell you how to do it—and wondering how they get away with that, how that's possible, because your name is unique to you. Perhaps they put a space at the beginning, so it's no longer "Dave Smith"—it's " Dave Smith", a unique name. Or they'll put a period at the end of it: "Dave Smith." instead of "Dave Smith"—with a name like "Dave Smith," there are a lot of them out there.

Sexting, slut shaming, social media bullying, text wars and text attacks—and tragedy news mirroring. They take actual tragic news, things that would stir up some emotion with you, and they replace the victim's name with yours. The story is about you now, not somebody else. They're talking about things like a death or something even worse, and that is being sent to people, in a way, to attack them.

Trickery or hoodwinking, trolling: You've all heard about trolls. We see them sometimes on our Twitter accounts, where you'll post something and it will just be a steady stream of attacks. What's interesting about it—and I will give a nod to my colleague from Hamilton, because she made a comment about social media companies that create these platforms, and they should have some responsibility for it—there are platforms out there where you can buy troll accounts. For a very small amount of money, less than 10 bucks, you can have hundreds of troll accounts that will attack somebody with negative comments. It's an entire industry now. There is something

that should be done about that. How do we stop it? The challenge that we face at the Ontario Legislature, though, is that the Internet is worldwide. We could pass a bill that says that you can't do this, but it's not enforceable, because all they do is set the troll account up in some other country, in some other jurisdiction. It's really, really difficult. This is where education comes in. This is where we need to be educating kids on how to avoid these things and how to deal with these things.

Twitter pooping: It is actually called "twitter pooping," and it is just that, dropping crap on somebody on Twitter. It's specific to Twitter, because right now Twitter is one of the worst ones for cyberbullying.

Warning wars: This is an interesting way of attacking somebody. They're not actually coming at you directly. Instead, a number of social media platforms have created ways where, if you're not following the intent of what the tool was for, if you're doing things that you shouldn't be doing, there's a way to report that. They investigate, and they'll close your account down. They'll send a warning to you. What warning wars are is flooding that social media site with comments that you're doing things that you shouldn't be doing. That social media site has an automated tool which sends a warning out to tell you not to do it. It then gets flooded with it, so you, as the individual user who is not doing anything wrong are constantly getting messages saying, "Your behaviour is bad, and if you don't stop, we're going to remove your account from you."

I'm 50. Most of us in here are over the age of 23, with the exception of possibly Mr. Oosterhoff. But everybody else is a little bit older than that. If we're getting a message and we know that we've done nothing wrong, and it says, "Your account is going to be disabled if you don't stop what you're doing," we're probably going to look at that and say, "You have no idea what you're talking about. That was just an automated message. I haven't done anything wrong." Put yourself in the position of somebody who is seven, eight, nine, 10, 15, who is already questioning what they do—because that's what kids do. They're not sure about themselves. They've been beaten down by somebody else. They've been through this whole bullying process, and now the social media site that they've been using, that they were having fun with, starts telling them, "Stop what you're doing or we're going to disable your account." It just creates that much more anxiety for them.

YouTube channelling: That's where they take videos and they create an entire YouTube channel dedicated to attacking a child, and then they share those videos. They constantly push it out.

Again, I come back to the biggest difference between bullying and cyberbullying today: When I was a kid, when you were bullied it was that instance. When the instance ended, the bullying ended for the day. Now, the instance is constant. It's 24 hours a day. It's seven days a week. It's 365 days a year. When the bullying ends, that record remains, and it remains forever. Google doesn't get rid of any of the searches. Google caches every single page that

it brings up. That record is there forever. Those kids are traumatized forever. The amount of counselling they're going to need on an ongoing basis just to get them back to where they were, to get them back to that state that they were at before the bullying started—many of them will never get back to that state, and it doesn't matter how much counselling is done.

We're always one step behind technology. We cannot pass legislation here at the Ontario Legislature that affects the entire Internet—it's not possible. So what we have to do instead is to create that awareness, and that's what this bill does. We have to have the education so the kids know it is not their fault, so the kids know they've done nothing wrong, so the kids know they can go to someone and get help.

1540

We're not going to be able to stop cyberbullying, but we can prevent it from affecting someone else, and we can do that through awareness; we can do that through education. That's what is incumbent upon us to do—to make sure that we pass a bill like this so we can create that awareness, so those kids get to grow up and be young adults, and they can be kids while they're kids.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I'm really happy to be speaking on Bill 154, and I thank the MPP from Mississauga East–Cooksville for bringing this forward. I think that having another day to talk about bullying, and more importantly, cyberbullying as an offshoot of that, is very, very important. We have this awareness—we have days already. We have a curriculum in our schools. But what we don't have are the resources and the awareness, or the will, to actually put systems in place that stop cyberbullying. I think that's very important, and hopefully, as we raise awareness, people will become more and more aware of how insidious this problem is.

I think that if we did a survey in our ridings, probably each of us would find a student, a young person, who was damaged to the point where in some cases they took their own life from the impact of cyberbullying. As parents, as grandparents, we see and hear those stories. We hear them in our ridings. One in five children or young people, they say, have been cyberbullied, but consider if you are different in any way, if you have a disability, if you are an LGBTQ+ person in your community. The statistics of that are they are bullied even further.

What's really problematic about cyberbullying is the damage it does to folks. In Thunder Bay–Atikokan and in northwestern Ontario, we have a criminal lack of mental health services for children. We've brought this forward again and again. There are wait-lists over a year long. So consider when parents come to us and they say, "My child needs help. They've been bullied. They've been bullied on the Internet." Some of them say, "I have to take them out of school." These are stories that happen all the time. There are no mental health services for those children in our area that are accessible in a timely fashion, and that is not right.

So awareness is very, very important, but access to mental health services to help those people who have been damaged by this insidious problem is also very important. I urge us not only to support this bill, but to look forward to providing those services in our communities.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Lindsey Park: It's a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 154, an act to proclaim a cyberbullying prevention and awareness day in Ontario. I rose last to speak to this bill; I believe it was December 5, 2019. The whole world feels like it's changed and we've all been through a lot, as have the people of Ontario, since then. But this topic remains an important one, especially as we all continue to do more and more of our business online, and young people are doing more and more of their learning online.

I can think back to when the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville first introduced this bill. At that time, our ministry, the Ministry of the Attorney General, where I'm the parliamentary assistant, had not yet introduced our measures that were in the Smarter and Stronger Justice Act on cyberbullying, so to talk about some government action that really came out of the advocacy done by this member—I think awareness days are important, and that's why we are here to talk about it.

The reason for awareness is so that real action and real change comes. Without awareness, people can't change their ways. They're not even aware enough to change their ways. The point of the awareness is so that government action can be taken on it, so that action can be taken in our education system and action can be taken at other levels of government.

I believe at the end of when I first spoke to this bill in December, I called on the federal government to make changes. Our police have been asking for changes to the federal Criminal Code to make it easier to prosecute cyberbullying. I think that's needed. This pandemic and how much of our time is spent online has only highlighted the need for these kinds of important changes.

Again, because of the member's advocacy and awareness and thoughtfulness in bringing forward a bill like this, which I'm pleased to support—I want to go back to and highlight some of the changes that were in the Smarter and Stronger Justice Act that came from his advocacy. Many of you already know this, but I will just refresh everyone's memory on it. In the Smarter and Stronger Justice Act, we proposed changes to make it easier for victims of cyberbullying and online sexual exploitation to sue their offenders who have been convicted of distributing an intimate image of them online and against their will.

I want to make the connection there to those changes I have called for in the Criminal Code. There can't be a civil remedy, there can't be this remedy that we have created in the civil system if they're not first convicted in the criminal system. The police have said to us that some real changes need to be made under the Criminal Code so it's easier to convict people on the criminal side. Just like we've said, it takes many justice partners, community

partners and education partners to raise awareness and make change. It also takes all levels of government. So I'm pleased—I hope that as part of when this bill is passed and an awareness day, we can involve our federal partners and bring them to the table and talk about how we can work together so that both under the criminal law and under the civil law, there are the remedies needed for these victims.

The changes that we made under the Smarter and Stronger Justice Act enable victims of human trafficking, as well, to be able to bring a civil action against their traffickers who are convicted of this offence. We have also heard from police that some changes to the Criminal Code would be helpful in prosecuting human trafficking.

I look across the aisle—I think it's awesome when there are issues all parties can work on together in this place. I know the member from Oshawa and I have both done ride-alongs with the Durham Regional Police Service human trafficking unit, which really is leading the way in this province and in this country in the solutions that they have put forward to fight human trafficking—a really unique model where the police are working together with victim services.

I was really pleased that just last week, I was able to join the member from Whitby and the member from Pickering–Uxbridge to announce \$300,000 that's being directed specifically to the human trafficking unit of the Durham Regional Police Service. People would say, "What are they using \$300,000 for? That's a lot of money." Yes, it is a lot of money, because a lot of money is needed to give police the resources needed to fight this crime.

One of the unique things about the Durham regional police model and working with victim services is, when they are at the scene tracking down these predators, they bring along someone who was a victim of human trafficking and has recovered to the scene to be able to talk to the victims, because it's a very difficult decision for them to decide they want to get out of this. Their whole livelihood, support network, their money, their clothing—everything is being funded by this pimp. It's not an easy decision to all of a sudden decide that tomorrow, that's all going to change when they don't know where their support is going to come from.

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This unique model that started in Durham region—I'm really pleased; we're going to have—her name is Karly Church. She does this incredible work in the Durham Regional Police Service. We're going to be able to have a second Karly in Durham region. With this funding, they're going to be able to hire a second person who's going to be able to help with that work within the Durham Regional Police Service—and also talk about the work of education and why awareness is important with this bill. They're going to be able to continue the great work they're doing educating the community.

I think that ties nicely into why educating is so important. Many don't even know—just like cyberbullying, with human trafficking, lots of people have no idea it's happening every day in our community. Young people in Durham region—the average age of recruitment is 13

years old. That's atrocious. It's disgusting. If any one of our family members at 13 years old was recruited into this, we would do anything and everything to stop it and get to the bottom of it. That's the duty we have as legislators to the people of Ontario—to act like that 13-year-old who's being recruited into sex trafficking is a member of our own family, is our brother, is our sister.

Once again, I want to thank the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville for his leadership in bringing forward this important bill. There's such a connection with these intimate crimes. Often, human trafficking actually starts as cyberbullying online, or a stranger reaching out through Instagram, pretending to be their friend and saying, "Hey, let's meet up on the playground today," pretending to be someone at their own school. Then there are adults in the schoolyard who are showing up. Maybe they first pretend to be a really great boyfriend, buy them nice clothes, pay for their nails to get done, their hair to get done; and then suddenly, things turn very badly. It's this whole process, this whole cycle of manipulation, but it starts as this thing that none of us sees online.

I think more parents, if they were aware, would pay attention—just like you have, speaking of the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville—to the messages their children are sending online, because there's so much. We even see it on our own members' social media accounts. It's so hard to tell who you're interacting with online sometimes—and this is us. At what point in our career—we've all had various experiences before coming to this House. We're talking about a child who hasn't had some of those life experiences yet to realize that not everyone in the world they're interacting with is in it with good intentions. But we know how many anonymous accounts there are online and the poor regulation, frankly, of the social media world and the Internet that needs to improve—that so many terrible things are happening.

I saw today an example of a whole Ponzi scheme that our Serious Fraud Office is investigating in the provincial government that has been going on since—I think it was from 2012. These things can be going on underneath our noses for decades and we have no idea.

So I think this awareness day is going to be an incredible way to talk about some of these things we don't want to talk about, because they're not pleasant to talk about. They're not the things you choose to talk about at your kitchen table when you're having dinner. If your dad brought it up, you'd say, "Well, I'd rather not talk about that, Dad, because it's not pleasant to talk about."

These awareness days have a purpose. They force us to talk about some of those really difficult issues in our society that, although unpleasant, are there. We have to have the courage as legislators and leaders in the community to talk about them and to find solutions—although solutions are not always easy, and they're difficult to come by, sometimes. By talking about it, by hashing it out, you'd be amazed at how leaders in the community step up and really want to find solutions to these things.

I'm really pleased to support this bill, and I thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to the debate today.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm happy to add my voice to the debate on this bill, Bill 154, An Act to proclaim Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day, which would take place on the third Friday of every June in Ontario, so I guess starting in June 2021.

Ça me fait extrêmement plaisir d'avoir la chance de discuter un peu du projet de loi proclamant la Journée pour l'élimination de la cyberintimidation en Ontario. Le projet de loi va déclarer que le troisième vendredi du mois de juin chaque année sera la Journée pour l'élimination de la cyberintimidation en Ontario. Si le projet de loi va de l'avant, et ça a tout l'air que tout le monde est d'accord ici aujourd'hui, la première fois qu'on pourra célébrer cette journée-là sera au mois de juin 2021.

La cyberintimidation, comme on l'a dit, est une forme de communication électronique qui, directement ou indirectement, nuit à la santé et au bien-être physique ou mental de quelqu'un d'autre. Elle comprend notamment l'intimidation, les menaces et le harcèlement.

La cyberintimidation peut entraîner de graves répercussions négatives, surtout chez les enfants, mais plusieurs adultes en sont victimes également, et les répercussions peuvent durer toute leur vie.

La cyberintimidation, malheureusement, est à la hausse en Ontario, et ce que le projet de loi essaie de faire, c'est vraiment d'utiliser la Journée pour l'élimination de la cyberintimidation en Ontario dans le but de sensibiliser les gens et le public à ce type de problème et essayer de le prévenir.

Le projet de loi veut également contribuer à munir les enfants et les adultes d'outils pour se protéger contre la cyberintimidation en favorisant la discussion sur ce sujet à l'école et au travail. Comme il a été dit cet après-midi, parler de cyberintimidation, ce n'est pas un sujet que les gens abordent fréquemment. C'est un sujet qui est difficile pour les parents qui s'aperçoivent que leur enfant vit la cyberintimidation et qui n'ont pas toujours les mots pour essayer d'aider leur enfant, leur aider à comprendre, leur aider à se débarrasser de ça. Le projet de loi vise à rendre ces outils plus disponibles à tout le monde. Comme je l'ai dit, ça se passerait le troisième vendredi.

Cyberbullying is happening more and more in Ontario. We see it on social media. Whether it be on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat or TikTok, you can find it everywhere. We can also see it sometimes in text messaging, and kids who have a cellphone or tablet can become a victim of cyberbullying.

There are a number of concerns that have to do with cyberbullying. The first one is that the cyberbullying is often persistent; that is, it doesn't only happen once, but it will continue to happen over and over again, which makes it really difficult for children who are experiencing cyberbullying to find relief. They have to go online—because we all know that children had to be online when the schools shut down. Even to this day, many of them have to go online every day. But every time they go online, the bullying is there. It is persistent.

Second is that it is permanent. What I mean by that is that a lot of the harmful words that are targeted at the victim will be there forever. You can go back on their Facebook wall, you can go back into their account, you can go back and see—and so can the victim.

For parents, it is often hard to notice. The teacher and the parents are attuned to bullying. Like, if you see it in the classroom, the teachers know to recognize it and know how to help the child. If you see it happening in the playground or when the parents bring their child to the park or whatever, as a parent, you will recognize the tone of the voice, the words that are used. You will recognize what bullying is and usually step in to try to stop it. Once it's online, it becomes a whole lot more difficult for parents and teachers to be able to protect the children who are victims of cyberbullying, which means that the consequences on the child's mental health are often more intense and harder.

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Unfortunately, some people will be changed forever, for the rest of their lives. It doesn't matter how much therapy. They will be happy again and they will get over it, but there's a part of them that will never forget what they lived through. Is this something we should address? Yes, absolutely. Is this something that this bill will address? I would say it takes some significant steps toward helping. Certainly declaring the third Friday of June as the day to recognize cyberbullying is a day that hopefully the media will pick up. Hopefully, social media will pick it up and give people tools on how to recognize it, how to stop it, how to protect the victim and how to support the victim. I've talked mainly about children, but it happens in adults as well, and the consequences for adults are the same. They can be profound and they can be severe. So the bill will do this.

What I'm really interested about and that we haven't seen yet is what those tools will look like. What will be available to parents? What will be available to teachers who want to help, who want to be on the lookout for what changes in a child happen when they first encounter bullying? When bullying happens in the schoolyard, it's usually pretty easy: The child does not want to go in the schoolyard anymore. When it happens at school, again, it's pretty easy: The child does not want to go to school anymore. "Well, why don't you want to go to school? You love school, all your friends; you love your teacher. How come you don't want to go?" And you quickly find out that they don't want to go because they're being bullied by another child at school.

When it comes to the Internet, it is not that easy, and it's not easy for children to express this either, because they don't recognize it and are not able to seek help. It allows the problems to grow way, way bigger and with consequences.

Are there other steps that can be done? Yes, absolutely. I can talk about the oldest of my granddaughters, who has been a victim of bullying. I can tell you that the minute she heard that she did not have to go to school, she was one of the first ones who signed up: "No, I'm staying home. I

don't want to go to school because I'm being bullied." There are lots of kids like this. The changes in her were—she went from a happy-go-lucky child who loved school, had a million friends, to a shadow of who she was, and that was because of bullying, and it took us a long time to realize what was going on.

Apparently, 22% of kids live through the same thing my granddaughter has lived through. What I would like added to this is that there should be access for children's mental health at some point. We did the best we could. I am not a psychologist. I'm not a social worker. I don't know how to rebuild her self-esteem. I tried the best I could. But I would really appreciate having help that comes from a professional person who could help us. In Sudbury, the wait-list for a child to see a mental health counsellor is a year. Lots of things go wrong in a year. Lots of changes will be really hard to undo before she ever goes through this wait-list and gets some professional help. Maybe if we had been able to have access to a psychologist within a few weeks of finding out what was going on, she would not have changed so much, and she would be a happy-go-lucky child like she used to be.

So are those important steps? Yes, absolutely. Will we support this? Absolutely. Do you want to declare the third Friday of June as anti-cyberbullying? We will be there with you. Do you want to have some tools available? Absolutely. I would be curious to see what those tools are, and please make them available as quickly as possible, but don't stop there. Look at the kids who have faced bullying. Look at what kind of support they need. Make those supports available in a timely fashion.

We have our MPP for Parkdale–High Park, who has put a bill forward to make sure that every child who needs children's mental health will get it within a maximum period of one month. I would love for this to be true for the people I represent and for my own family. Sudbury is not the only place where children have to wait over a year for some of the programs for children's mental health. The wait-list is 18 months. A lot of children will come and they will age out of children's mental health because of the time it takes to get help, only to be put on the wait-list for adult mental health that starts later.

It's a good step that we will support, but there is way more that can be done if we truly want to help the victims of cyberbullying, if we really all agree that the changes and the damage that are done to our children are something that could be reversed if we give them the help they need.

Ça m'a fait extrêmement plaisir de partager quelques mots. Le plus vite qu'on peut rendre les outils disponibles pour l'élimination de la cyberintimidation, le mieux ce sera, autant pour les enfants que pour les adultes qui sont victimes de ce type de crime.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Roman Baber: First I'd like to say how great it is to be back, how wonderful it is to see my colleagues, to see members from all parties—all of whom I consider to be friends—to see you, Madam Speaker, to see the staff and to be back in this magnificent chamber. Other than my member's statement this morning, I have not addressed the

House in about six months, and I missed it terribly. It really gives us a perspective whenever we're struggling or whenever we're frustrated—because this is not an easy job—what a remarkable privilege it is to be here and to serve here.

With it being the first day back, I brought a lot of stuff with me today, so I had to drive, but normally I take the subway downtown. I live in the geographical centre of York Centre, across from the Sheppard West subway station. I take the subway to Queen's Park almost daily. It takes me about 40 minutes door to door; it's great. It's difficult to see the subway almost empty these days, but when I come out the subway at College Street and I look at this remarkable building, Queen's Park, the Pink Palace, my heart is overjoyed. I come into this building, and I love everything about this building. I love the way it smells. I love the lighting. Although we have our disagreements, even with our close friends and colleagues, I generally like everyone here and am reminded of the privilege to be back. It's great to see everyone here healthy. I wish I could see your smiles, but I gather that might not happen for a while. I'm happy to welcome you back.

I also wish to thank all the MPPs from all the parties for their service to their constituents over the last couple of months. Our staff have been in this new work mode since March 16. We've been taking thousands of calls daily, thousands of emails, and responding to constituents who genuinely needed our help. I'm incredibly proud to serve my constituents and our province, especially during these extraordinary times.

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Madam Speaker, before I address the bill before the House, I hope that you and the members will afford me with a few more minutes of leeway to recognize our health care heroes, who, during the height of this pandemic, until this day, risk it all to help others. I want to express my deepest gratitude to the nurses, doctors, PSWs, lab technicians, imaging technicians, support staff, admin staff and volunteers in hospital settings, community settings and long-term care for their heroic actions in getting Ontario through the unknown during the acute stages of the pandemic and to this day.

I want to say a quick thank you to some of the partners that were instrumental in helping my York Centre constituents through the challenges of the last few months: the North York food bank, Second Harvest, the Bank of Nova Scotia at Finch and Dufferin, Dr. Feldman of North York General Hospital, Dr. Fishman of the Scarborough Health Network, Betel seniors, and so many others that were so helpful to me and others during this difficult time. Thank you so much for all you've done for our community.

I want to thank you, Madam Speaker, and all of my colleagues for this brief indulgence.

I'm pleased to speak briefly to Bill 154, and I thank my friend from Mississauga East–Cooksville for bringing it forward. Madam Speaker, as so many Ontario families return to school via e-learning and online classes, the risk of cyberbullying returns as well. In fact, it's never gone.

Cyberbullying, simply put, is an electronic communication that harms someone's physical or mental health. It can include intimidation, threats, harassment, peer pressure, misrepresentations. Ontario has seen an increase in cases of cyberbullying recently. When kids have already been through so much in this pandemic, the last thing children need is to deal with bullies coming in their safe space of their homes as well, on their phones.

Passing the Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day Act will increase awareness and reduce the stigma, and I'm proud to support Bill 154 in the House today. Bill 154 will give parents an opportunity to sit down with their kids and have a conversation about Internet safety. It will also encourage parents to have conversations with kids, or encourage adults who themselves engage in cyberbullying to think twice about the potential effect of what they're doing. It will empower families with tools to protect themselves from cyberbullying by encouraging open dialogue in schools and in places.

Bill 154 is deserving of the bipartisan support that it will hopefully receive, and it's a good day for all Ontarians when we come together to fight bullying in the classroom, in the workplace and online.

While awareness is important, it's not enough on its own. Bill 154 goes further. It suggests partnership with community organizations to support existing bullying programming, and this would be a day that would be important to increase not just awareness, but prevention.

I'm proud to support the bill, and while this concludes my written remarks, I want to express a couple of thoughts on cyberbullying. I have to be very, very careful not to identify the family, but I've come across an instance of cyberbullying not too long ago within my constituency, and this was of an adolescent child that had already struggled mentally. There is no underestimating how much our children have suffered during this pandemic—the Zoom birthday parties, not seeing their friends, not seeing their classmates. Like the Premier said, kids have never been eager to get back to school this much, ever.

This particular child was enrolled in a morning activity, outdoor activity, one of the few that were allowed during this pandemic. They started experiencing cyberbullying and, regretfully, they advised their parents that they would rather not go anymore, even though this was one of the only sources of refuge that this child had to leave the home, to partake in a physical activity, enjoy the sun. But unfortunately, they felt that they could not continue. This is a true story and something that regretfully happens every day, and is contemplated by this bill.

I agree with my colleague from Hamilton that this is probably just the first step and that we need to seriously give some thought as to what we can do to take a bite out of cyberbullying. I want to suggest a couple of things. First of all, as political advocates, as representatives to our community, it's very, very important that we actively discourage such behaviour when it comes to political advocacy.

There are a lot of conversations on Twitter these days. Twitter has become a weapon. I can say that I'm sure that

almost every member of this Parliament and every member of this government has experienced some form of cyberbullying in the last couple of years, and it has been very difficult for many of us. It's important that we address our own constituencies, that we send a message to our own supporters, or folks who may be inclined to agree with us on issues, or folks who may wish to hold the other side to account or folks who may wish to hold the other side at bay, that this is not acceptable, because it doesn't advance anyone's cause. It further polarizes us, which is regretful. I urge all members to actively speak out against cyberbullying within the political context and to help their friends as we attempt to deal through some of these difficult situations.

Another thought I wanted to convey to the House is that this is a very, very complex issue, because it does not lend itself out to an intuitive regulatory solution. This goes to the issue of speech, and I'd love to perhaps get some thoughts from the Attorney General on this, or anyone who is interested in speech at large. We know that freedom of expression is sacred. It is enshrined in the charter, and I will submit that freedom of expression is the holiest of rights, because it's through expression that we defend all other charter rights. If there was an autocratic regime that wanted to come and take our rights away, we would first and foremost use speech and expression to hold it back.

There are some framers of other constitutions who believe that expression should not be abridged except in the clearest of cases. That may not be where the law is in Ontario or in Canada, but the principle is recognized and the principle is largely accepted through common law jurisdictions. That creates a challenge as we look at some of this behaviour online in terms of attempting to create some sort of regime that would preclude this. Even freedom of speech has limits. For instance, no one has the right to engage in hate speech. No one has the right to, God forbid, incite violence. We know that that line exists; it's just that it's a difficult line to draw.

Within the framework of the common law, it is in fact accepted principle that we do not have the freedom to be free from being offended. There is no freedom that says, "You are free from someone offending you." It's important, because we want to enable fair criticism. Sometimes calling out folks may be in the public interest, particularly in the political context, so it's very, very difficult to draw that line. I'm not sure how. If government, if resources, were really to think about this, how we would go about effectively policing cyberbullying, I would like to get a legal opinion on this. I'm not sure if it's entirely possible.

1620

But there are other creative ways that I can think of that would perhaps get us to the same destination. One of the huge advantages—I guess cyberbullying is enabled primarily by the fact that it's typically conducted anonymously. That is really the driving force behind this. In a school setting, it may be different, but in an anonymous setting—Twitter, other social media—extreme cyberbullying—intimidation, threats, disclosure, what have you—is driven by folks who are anonymous behind the

screen. When you cannot identify the perpetrator, when you have no means to identify the perpetrator—in some cases, even through legal action you still can't identify the perpetrator—then that anonymity affords the perpetrator a measure of protection that would encourage them. There is very little deterrent when there is no risk of getting caught. Yes, there are some exceptions where you could perhaps advance legal action against the social media forum and compel disclosure, but that is very, very difficult to get. In fact, my understanding is that the law on this is evolving, and typically the law errs—unless there's a security concern or government is involved, you may not be able to be successful. So maybe that is the direction that we need to be looking at.

We have a principle where we encourage folks to participate in day-to-day life in an open fashion. We had a mask debate in this country long before the pandemic. It was during the former federal government that had some questions about what kind of religious attire is appropriate under which circumstances. While I did not necessarily agree with my former federal colleagues on all those matters, the principle that they tried to enunciate is that when you interact with people in daily life, you're entitled to appreciate their identity. You should know who you're dealing with. That, in and of itself, will bring some sort of a measure of respect, courtesy and civility to people's daily business.

Maybe this is something that, down the road, could be considered. Would people behave the same way if they were publicly on social media outlets with their identity revealed? Maybe not. We expect identity to be revealed in our daily dealings in physical life. Now, especially with so much—the technology sector has been accelerated by five to 10 years in the last five months. With so much of our lives now moving online, being driven by technology, would it be unreasonable to suggest that perhaps we should apply the same standard to our online life? I'm not sure that it would be unreasonable.

While this is a good first step, and I want to thank my colleague from Mississauga for calling awareness to this very, very difficult issue, I encourage all of my friends in the House to consider, what are we doing next? What are we doing next in order to preserve the rule of law and not offend and not abridge expression, but at the same time, take a meaningful step towards attaining the purpose, which is to end this evil that cyberbullying is? I'm not sure that content regulation is really the way to go. Whether it's issues of speech or technology or what have you, maybe the solution is, if we're living our lives online, then let's show ourselves online. And that could probably be accomplished more easily. We demand all sorts of disclosure in our daily discourse. Whether you're dealing with a government institution, you're dealing with legal representation, folks are allowed to know. Maybe this is something to consider.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to address the House again. I've missed all of you. I wish you a healthy and productive session, and I look forward to speaking to all of you soon.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is a pleasure for me to rise today as the MPP for London West, on behalf of the community that I represent, to speak in support of Bill 154, Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day Act. As has been mentioned, the purpose of this bill is to proclaim the third Friday of June in each year as Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day. Certainly, that is an admirable goal. It's something that we can support. Although, much of the impact of the legislative action that we are proposing to take here depends on what happens after we declare the third Friday in June of each year as Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day.

A lot of really important and constructive comments have been made during this debate today. I wanted to speak about three specific pieces that I don't think we have really talked about yet this afternoon.

The first comes from my experience as a school board trustee. Some members in this chamber may be aware that I was an elected school board trustee for 13 years in the Thames Valley District School Board, first elected in 2000, and always, always passionate about ensuring that young people in our schools felt safe when they went to school every day. Bullying in schools has been an issue that I have been involved with throughout my life as a school board trustee, and now as an MPP.

Back in 2000 when I was elected, and there was a lot of discussion at the school board level about effective violence prevention strategies, anti-bullying strategies, I remember one of the research reports that was brought to trustees for consideration that had a real, profound and lasting impact on me was about the effect of witnessing bullying on the bystander.

At the time, the research showed that for bystanders who feel powerless to intervene, who feel powerless, who don't know how to step in and stop the bullying, the impact can be as damaging to that bystander as to the victim him or herself. And so we really started to focus much more on bystander intervention programs to equip young people with the tools that they needed to step in when they saw another student, a friend or somebody on the playground being victimized by bullies at school.

One of the most insidious things about cyberbullying, unfortunately, unlike the kind of physical bullying that we see on the playground, is that the bystander effect is very, very different. People who witness online bullying, people who see a Facebook post or a Snapchat or Instagram that is hurtful to somebody else, don't see first-hand the effect that that is having on the person who is targeted by that online post. It's not like seeing somebody being kicked and bleeding and crying. They don't see how devastating that action can be on the person who is targeted.

1630

That is why it is so important to engage in education and awareness, especially with young people, about what cyberbullying is so that they can recognize when there is an online activity that can be causing harm to somebody else and they can understand what this is doing to the

person who is at the receiving end. That is one of the reasons why we would support this bill—if it is backed up by that education and awareness that needs to happen so that students understand what bullying behaviour actually is when it happens online and the kind of harm that it causes to the person who is on the receiving end.

The second point I would like to make, and I make this suggestion to the government in all good faith: I think that it is really, really important that we recognize the gendered violence and harassment that takes place online. We must recognize that the most violent kind of cyberbullying is directed at women and girls. More and more, we are seeing digital tools that are used to harass women and girls specifically because of their gender.

We've all heard the stories of Rehtaeh Parsons and Amanda Todd, teenagers who took their life because there were intimate photographs of them that were shared. The devastation that that caused these young women and led to their suicides, unfortunately, wasn't just a one-off. It wasn't just something that happened to these two young women, one in BC and one in Nova Scotia. This is something that women and girls experience all the time—all the time, Speaker.

When we talk about cyberbullying, we have to understand it as not just a generic category of harmful behaviour that equally affects everyone in our society. It has a very different impact on women and girls who are affected by cyberbullying.

I just want to say, as women in this Legislature—I'm very proud of the fact that half of our NDP caucus are women, but for women in public life, to have that online presence means that you are opening up yourself to a manner of public attack that is unlike anything that any male who is in politics has ever encountered. You just look at some of the disgusting, obscene, terrible, degrading kinds of online hatred that is directed at women politicians and you will know what I mean.

The third point that I wanted to emphasize in this debate is related to the fact that adults, as I have mentioned, also encounter cyberbullying, and they often encounter cyberbullying at work. We know that, as devastating as the impact of cyberbullying is on children, it can be equally devastating on adults who are victims of cyberbullying. And when you have a workers' compensation system—WSIB—that continues to deny compensation to injured workers who are suffering from chronic mental stress that is often related or could be related to cyberbullying that they have experienced from a co-worker, there is a problem.

We have to look at the support systems that we have in place to make sure that people who experience cyberbullying, whether they are young people, whether they are at work, whether they are LGBTQ+, whether they are people with disabilities—that the supports are there to help them deal with that experience of cyberbullying, to heal and to recover and to move forward. As has been mentioned, the consequences of cyberbullying can be devastating, and they can be something that people have to take forward with them in their lives forever. That is, as

we have acknowledged, one of the realities of cyberbullying—that when things are said about someone online, when photos are shared online, you can't get that back. You have to live with the knowledge that whatever was said about you, whatever images were shared of you on the Internet, that is there forever—forever. Despite all of the actions of the police and the legal system, you can never be sure that those images, those words no longer exist.

Speaker, I want to close by saying, yes, we support this bill to declare a day as Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day. But we are committed to doing much more, to working with the government, to making sure that the supports are in place to actually help those who experience cyberbullying recover, and to prevent acts of cyberbullying in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Jane McKenna: I was asked by the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville to speak today on this bill, and I was absolutely touched that he asked me to speak. I want to thank you so much, first of all, for bringing this forward, because any day that we can recognize and talk about it just makes it so much better. It actually brought to mind that, when I was here, the former MPP from Kitchener—Waterloo, Elizabeth Witmer, who had served as Minister of Education, Minister of Labour, Minister of Health and Deputy Premier during her 22 years in office, had brought her bill forward, Bill 14, and then it became the government of the day's bill, Bill 13. The reason I'm saying that is—it was Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week. Anything we can do to talk about bullying—thank you so much for this. It's an honour to stand here.

I want to touch on a couple of things today—just more of a personal note, because the member opposite just talked about Amanda Todd. I pulled up Wikipedia, and it actually shows one of her screen shots. It said, "I have nobody. I need someone." I was in tears reading what had happened to her at 15 years of age. We all know. I'm just going to reiterate—because there were 13 million views that watched that. I have five kids, and I remember my kids saying to me, "Mum, everybody has watched it, but we all have our own stories, and there's no one there to help us with our stories." I was heartbroken to hear that.

I'm just going to digress for a minute on two of my kids and something that just happened with my identical twin sister. My identical twin sister has every right to put something up and to blog it, and she decided to write about her story, but somehow, that's about my story, because we're identical twins. My son called me in tears and he said, "Mum, did you see what Auntie Anne has put on her blog?" and that she's continued to do this throughout. I said, "No, I haven't." He said, "Mum, if you weren't prepared to tell us how you were abused, Auntie Anne has no business putting that on." My kids were devastated. So I said, "Listen, I don't want to see any of it. If you want to phone Auntie Anne and tell her that"—and my one daughter phoned and said, "Auntie Anne, my mum decided not to tell us what happened when she was growing up with her dad, but somehow you decided to tell that

story." My identical twin sister just said, "Well, that's my story and I'm entitled to say what I want," which is fine, and I agree that everybody has that opportunity. But what happened in my life was private for myself and for my children. I didn't want my kids to go through what I went through—the reason being, it's over, it's done. Life moves on. I can't be paralyzed in that for the rest of my life.

1640

I was mortified when my kids called and told me about it. I never confronted my sister about it because there was no point, but I'm just saying, even with our own families, the damage that people do—and I get the member was saying that when you don't see someone hitting somebody or physically doing something, the people don't realize the damage that they do. Well, I'm going to say right there, I don't believe that with what my sister did—the reason in saying that is, it was very hurtful. It was a terrible time in my life, and she would know how that would make me feel.

That's one thing I want to say, because sitting in here today, it's heartbreaking—because every one of us has a story. Every one of us knows of somebody who has been abused or bullied, and it's so heartbreaking that we can't change that.

We live in a democracy. We're all entitled to our opinions. I appreciate that. But it's very different when you express those on social media and you talk about things that are threatening, bully-like, and how that makes people feel. I don't think I have to see that. I'm a human being. If you pinch me, it hurts.

I'm off Twitter, and I say that because we've heard a lot of conversations today about Twitter. My daughter Taylor called me—I don't know, I'm going to say two months ago—and said, "Mum, oh my gosh, you're not going to believe"—whatever the fake name was on there—"this person talking about you at an event, and that you literally make him sick to his stomach because he has to look at you and he can't wait until you're no longer an MPP anymore because you're disgusting." So Taylor is crying, and I said, "Taylor, listen to me. What somebody thinks of me does not define who I am as an individual. I know you're sad, but don't take it to heart because what kind of person is that who sits and talks about someone's personal appearance"—which some of us have had in here—"when it had nothing to do with what we were doing." And it was a wonderful thing about food banks that we were actually talking about and doing.

I'm just saying that it didn't affect me in any way. I'm not on it anymore because, personally, I look at Twitter and there's nothing good that comes from that—I'm just saying my personal thing. I have to be on social media. But the reality is, at the end of the day, what you think of how I look doesn't define who I am, and who I am as an individual is who I am. I'm proud of that. I'm proud of my five kids and I'm proud of how I've raised them. But I'm not going to be subjected to someone personally making attacks to me.

I digress and say that again because—as I said, I'm no longer on Twitter, but I pulled this up as I was coming

home one day. It was from August 24, on Newstalk 1010 with Hayley Cooper, and it was about cyberbullying experts concerned over teachers' online behaviour towards the education minister. I pulled it up just to see what some of those comments were. They're not even worth repeating because they become personal. That's not who we are and what we're doing in this House and how we're supposed to be doing the best that we can—because we have a position in why we're doing those things.

When I sit in here today, it makes me sad that we're in the 21st century and we still have people who are still treating people with such disregard and disrespect. We all have to lead by example and understand that people watch what we do; your kids watch your behaviour and they watch things that are on social media. Start with ourselves, because how we conduct ourselves on an everyday basis is what gives our kids' generation the green light to continue what they're doing. So, if I say anything, if just one of us makes a change every day to make a difference on social media—because we watch and we have people who bully. If we're standing beside the bully, then we're just as much of a bully because we're doing nothing to change any of that.

My daughter Taylor, when she went to high school, was bullied, and so she started “project 8.” I said to her today on the phone, “Taylor, why did you call it “project 8”?” She said, “Mum, because eight was an infinite sign to me, and all of us are in this together.” So actually it's more like “project infinity.” She just got up and said, “Everybody has to learn to love themselves. If you love yourself, everybody needs to know that things are okay.” I was proud of her for doing that, because we all have to take a stand somewhere.

And so today, my point is not to talk about the situation in my life where it is. My point is to say that just because we can't feel or watch what people are doing to people doesn't mean that we all don't have feelings. We all watch what happens on social media. Every one of us has been touched by it, because people hide behind social media just like they do emails. People will say something in an email, then you'll see them on the street and they're friendly as anything and they don't acknowledge any of that.

Anyway, that's all I have to say. I've really enjoyed the conversations in here today. I think it's important, especially as an MPP, to lead by example and to continue to lead by example. I thank you so much for giving me this opportunity to speak. I thank you for bringing this day forward. It means a lot of to all of us in here. Keep the conversation going.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Jamie West: Before I start, I just want to thank the member opposite for sharing that part of her story.

I love the part of the debate where we actually tell each other about each other. Sometimes, we just stick to the script all the time, and it becomes very rote and boring. I really appreciate the personal stories and learning about your families and learning your life experiences. I think

that's what people across Ontario want us to do—to bring our life experiences and voices of the constituents here. So thank you again to the member opposite for sharing her story.

It's interesting; as we were going through the debate, I kept making notes and scribbling, so you'll see me look all over my page. COVID-19 just seems so large. When I was listening to the early part of the debate—it seemed like all we've talked about primarily for the last five or six months has been COVID-19. It seems massive and all-consuming. I thought about online bullying and how that has that effect on our kids, on adults—that when you're in the centre of it and it feels like the whole world is against you and it's just piling on and piling on, it can feel as large as a pandemic, it can feel as pressuring as a pandemic for a lot of people.

I think it's great that we're debating the Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day Act, Bill 154, and I think it's great that it's probably going to go through. We all seem to be aligned on this. It's wonderful.

A speaker was talking about how this can cross over to real life; how it starts on a computer screen, but it affects you personally. When we got into the Zoom calls in the early days of COVID-19 video conferencing, I was on a Zoom conference call and they had people from the business program at a local college who were talking about the business plans that they were working on and that they developed. In the middle of it, there was a Zoom bombing. Someone jumped on and started asking the presenter to lift up her shirt. Imagine: It's the end of the school year and you've worked on this project your whole year. You've rehearsed it and you're nervous, and all of a sudden, “Lift up your shirt.” She was startled. She didn't know what was going on at first. There are 20 people on a Zoom call; you can't see everybody at the same time, and it seems so bizarre. But that's the reality of what happens.

This was happening before Zoom bombing. If you went to a comedy club, you would hear that. If there was a female comic, you would hear someone scream that out. This just becomes the next extension. In the same way we're trying to tackle bullying in the real world, we need to tackle it in the cyber world as well.

Over the last three years, running for the election and in the election, I've built up a fair amount of rhino skin. The comments that people put on social media used to affect me a lot more than they do now. I see them. I gloss over them. Really, if you're listening and you want to affect me, if you really want to get under my skin, write something thoughtful that you actually took the time to think about. Calling names—I just gloss over it. It has no effect. Tell me why you disagree with me. Tell me why I'm wrong. I'll pay attention to those a lot more than you just yelling at me about—I don't know, some sort of insult that you hurl.

We have a sense sometimes when we see people: “They'll get over it. That's why they ran for public office,” or, “They're popular at school. It's okay if I take a jab at them. They're tough, they'll get over it.” My son was six foot four and probably about 230 pounds when he came

into grade 9. I asked him about initiation, if they still had initiation and that kind of stuff, and he said, "Not really." I said, "Was there any kind of bullying?" He said, "Well, there were a couple of kids who stopped me in the hallway and were talking about how they were going to beat me up." I asked him what he did and he said, "I just stared at them until they left." It's fortunate if you're six foot four and built like a linebacker that if you stare at someone long enough, they probably lose that courage.

1650

But online, if you're not super popular, if you don't have a whole bunch of people who know what's happening to you or will come to your aid, it's you by yourself. And often it's you by yourself against, maybe, the popular kids or maybe a bunch of anonymous people who won't leave you alone, who are threatening you, who are trying to divide you from your friends or your family. That's dangerous and it's scary. This sort of bullying, at all different ages, crosses over to the real world.

We had an issue in my riding in Sudbury. The LGBTQ+ community was being bullied. It started online, where people were being accused of different things. It transitioned into the real world, where people who were doxxing, who were attacking and bullying the LGBTQ+ members of my community, were going to their workplace. Online, they were threatening violence, so people in their workplace, people riding the bus to work, were afraid to leave their homes. That's not acceptable in any situation.

I know the members opposite would join us—we had a press conference just to say bullying is not acceptable. Fortunately, because we were doing committee work, we had some members in town who joined me—I want to thank the member for Nickel Belt here in front of me, the member from Spadina–Fort York, and the member from London North Centre—just to have a press conference and say, "Stop bullying people." I appreciate that we're doing this as a day, because I think it's important. It's a good conversation to have.

The member from Durham talked about human trafficking, and the member from Peterborough–Kawartha talked about many, many ways to bully and spoof and pretend to be somebody else online. Sometimes people say you shouldn't say that; you'll give people ideas. They have those ideas already. We're not sharing anything. He's sharing information that we don't know, but the people who are doing this already know how to do it.

I talked earlier about this crossing over to real life, and the member from Durham sort of talked about this—where you pretend to be a friend. You pretend to be their boyfriend and ask for photos. Then you use that to bribe them and to bully them into doing different stuff. You pretend to be a friend and you say, "I'm selling my PS4; I'm going to get a PS5. I'm selling my PS4 for 50 bucks. Why don't we meet somewhere?" People who do this are smart. They know a system that works.

We need to have conversations with our kids about bullying, about how online activity can really endanger you, online or in real life.

I think that the Internet can be so great for debate. But at the same time, there is this tendency to float in our own little bubbles, our own little circles. I have a friend—I'll just use his first name because he's a Conservative and I don't want him to be kicked out of membership meetings. Ken is a Conservative. I've known him for more than a decade. We always have these good conversations. He has called me out before. I'll post an article and he'll text me or he'll just reply to it and he'll say, "That's from lefty.left.com" or something like that. Sometimes you just want to believe stuff. And I've done the same for him—where he'll quote an article that's written by two people in their basement. We have good conversations. I have a good sense and understanding of how people who don't think exactly like me think about stuff and what their opinions are. I always defend Ken because any time he replies to me, someone attacks him for not having the same opinion as me.

So I'm often in there saying, "I want to hear what other people think." This is important. You can't just attack someone because they have a different opinion. You can attack the idea. You can complain or disagree with them, but calling someone stupid or ridiculous or something isn't acceptable. I think we'd all agree on that.

It's important that we have that debate, but at the same time we have to figure out where the line is because something like this, anti-bullying, used the wrong way—you could stifle debate. You could say that anyone who disagrees with you now is bullying, that you silence them and you shut them down, that you can attack. As legislators, we can make life very difficult for a lot of people. And if they disagree with us, we can say, "Oh, they're bullies. We're being bullied."

I've heard the conversation about education workers, that they're bullying the minister. I'm not talking about those specific people, but a lot of people don't agree with the education minister right now. I'm not saying to attack him. I'm not saying that part of it. But you've got to make sure that when you're talking about people disagreeing with you, find the line between disagreeing and bullying. We have to have important conversations like this. We need to disagree with each other. We need to understand where the line is for bullying and disagreement, what's fair and not what's fair.

But ultimately, Speaker, when we have this conversation about cyberbullying day—and we're all aligned about the day and we're all going to agree to it, ultimately, at the end—what else are we going to do? Because having the day is just the conversation part of it. It's just that one part of it. It will be great because it will raise awareness. It will be great because we'll have conversations. We'll speak about it, and maybe it will grow the way the Bell Let's Talk Day has grown. But what else will we do, as the government, as legislators, all together? Will we put money into this? Will we put resources into this? The member from Nickel Belt talked about the lack of resources in greater Sudbury and how long you have to wait to see a mental health professional. You can't just circle in this one area and say, "Now we've done the hard work and we're finished."

The member from Durham talked about human trafficking, which is tied to this as well. We can't just say, "Let's have a human trafficking day," and not do the extra work and not put the money towards it, and that's what I'm saying about the cyberbullying day as well.

I think, ultimately, it's a great first step. The member opposite said that as well. It's a great first step, and now what else do we do?

I think in terms of the debate, that's where I'm going to stop, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: I'm glad to be back here at the Legislature. This has been an unprecedented and challenging summer for the people of Ontario, and for the riding of Scarborough–Rouge Park, which I am both honoured and privileged to serve and represent.

Madam Speaker, I stand here today to support the Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day act, which my good friend, the member for Mississauga East–Cooksville, put forth. This bill is important, not only for the great people of Scarborough–Rouge Park, but for the people of Ontario at large. It is especially critical for our young people.

Madam Speaker, the pandemic has swiftly forced people, businesses and schools to adopt new environments of social interaction. While we are blessed to be able to connect with friends, family and loved ones from the comfort of our homes with technology, it has also increased a practice that has steadily risen to become one of the most severe issues that young people, especially, are facing, and that is cyberbullying. Unfortunately, despite the many benefits of the Internet, it also allows for individuals to hide behind keyboards, and it allows them to hide behind screen names, to inflict horrid pain on others, and especially on our young people.

I recently had the opportunity to talk to a close friend of mine who described the lasting scars that bullying left on him. I saw tears pouring from his eyes as he told me about the pain he continues to carry, and how he felt that bullying has touched his very soul. With profound regret, I acknowledge that this experience is not an anomaly. We all know at least someone in our lives who has been affected by bullying, whether at school, work or any other place. While too often we do not know how to help, what each and every one of us can do is to be there and let those who are affected know that we hear them, we are listening and that we care.

Madam Speaker, in this spirit, I am here to lend my full support for this bill, in order to establish the third Friday of each June as the official Stop Cyberbullying Day in this great province. This day would help shed light on the audacious act of cyberbullying. It helps educate people on what it means to encounter cyberbullying in its many forms. Moreover, it helps to teach people how to help prevent it from occurring and how to call it out.

1700

When it comes to bullying, it is those who see it but do not act to stop it, whether intentionally or unintentionally, who do as much damage as those who engage in the act of

bullying itself. Thus, this day would help in the prevention and, hopefully, the eradication of bullying in multiple ways.

I often talk to many young people in my riding of Scarborough–Rouge Park, and when I ask them what the issues are that they find important, one concern I hear over and over again is that of bullying. I have affirmed my commitment to stopping it to them, and now I am proclaiming it to you. If this bill passes, it will help the residents of Scarborough–Rouge Park who have suffered the indignity of bullying, but will also help in preventing it from occurring in the future. That is why this bill is very critical.

In closing, I wish to encourage all my colleagues across the House to support this bill, thus making Ontario a safer place to live, play and work. We are all aware of the situation we are in and we are all aware of the work that needs to be done. Let us do the right thing and pass this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch.

Remarks in Oji-Cree.

I'm very happy to speak again. Greetings to everyone. Not only that, but a big thank you to MPP Rasheed for this motion, the Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day Act.

Certainly when we talk about Mississauga East–Cooksville versus Kiiwetinoong, there's a vast difference in where we come from and in who we represent, their backgrounds. But at the end of the day, we are all the same as human beings.

I know cyberbullying can be very devastating for anyone. Cyberbullying can be very devastating, especially for young people, young lives. I've seen it. I've seen it happen in our communities in the north—children, youth, the cases that come to light—and I know it's something that has been an issue in the riding of Kiiwetinoong.

Where I come from, in Kingfisher, it's a fairly new settlement. I know that my parents, before I was born, moved there in 1965. It was around 1973 when they built the school there, a federal school. It was around 1977 when we had our first telephone system. Probably around 1982 is when we got our hydro, and to get an actual airport in the community was in 1987. We got running water in the homes in 1994.

The reason I share that is, when we talk about the Internet, when we talk about telecommunications and being online, we're such a new community, we're such a very young community, but still, all the transition that happened—it was a big learning curve for our communities, for our youth. I know when we first got Internet, as well, it was probably 2005 when we were doing dial-up, and then it wasn't until about 10 years ago when we got fibre into the community. It's a very new concept for us.

I'm very proud to stand here and support this bill, to acknowledge that it's actually happening. But also we need to be able to invest in resourcing and investing in programming to address the issues that are happening. I say that because back in 2007, in one of the communities

I represented, that I still represent as an MPP, there was a lot of online bullying happening. I had this one small community of about 350 or 300 people that had two young girls die by suicide two days apart. By the end of the year, within that one-year period, they had four girls who died by suicide at the age of 12.

I know even the community leadership, the community leaders, tried to address that issue whereby they needed resources to be able to come up with a plan on how to address cyberbullying. It was very clear in their ask to the government on how to address it, whereby they already knew in June 2016 that there was actually an online suicide pact with online cyberbullying. What the community was told is, "Your proposal is in an awkward budget cycle." It took about seven months to lose those two kids, two children, two young girls. I actually went up to both funerals. I wasn't an MPP then but I worked for the community.

The reason why I share that story is, yes, it's very important to recognize cyberbullying in Ontario, but you have to put resources into it as well. And I'm sharing that story to not forget the north as well, not to forget where we come from, that we have very unique issues that we have to deal with when we talk about—I always talk about access to clean drinking water, I ask about education. We don't have any high schools in our communities and we have to travel out. There are 15- and 14-year-olds who travel out for the first time and go be there to attend high school.

Cyberbullying certainly is an issue, and that's something that we need to deal with in Ontario. This bill, this motion, I can support it, and I fully support it. Meegwetch for listening.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, thank you for your indulgence. As you know, the first few days in the House, the agenda can be a bit moving, so I just wish to inform the House that I have tabled some changes to the standing orders, which is my intention to call for debate tomorrow morning and tomorrow afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Will Bouma: I had some notes ready this afternoon, but unfortunately it feels like so much has been said, so I will begin by thanking the member for Mississauga East-Cooksville for bringing this private member's bill forward.

1710

I'm also quite thankful that we have the ability here in the House this afternoon to get back to private member's business. We all have goals when we decide to put our name forward and go through this journey to try to be a representative for our people in this place, and those are hard decisions, difficult decisions and hard things to have to do. But we do them so that we can do what's best for our communities. To be able to get back to private members' bills in this House, which is, in effect, as close as we can get to doing things specifically for our communities, is very, very good, so I'm appreciative of that.

Just to be able to talk about bullying and cyberbullying this afternoon in the House has been such an incredibly fruitful discussion. I really, really am thankful to the member for bringing this forward, if for no other reason—but it's much more than that—than to have this conversation here in the House.

As I listened, what I realized most, I think, was that every single one of us has been affected by this. We talk about it in schools. We talk about it as adults. We talk about it as what was said about some of our colleagues in different ways, about people we care about, about people we represent, whatever community they're from, whether they're LGBTQ or whatever these situations are. Bullying is such a prevalent part of our society. Then to have comments and discussion about some of the things we can do to try to solve this: As the member has said in his speech regarding this legislation, this is really just a beginning. It's a starting place. It's an awareness issue.

I really appreciated the member from Sudbury, when they saw this happening in their community—just to get a bunch of people together, to have a news conference and to say, "Stop. This is ridiculous." Because that's what it takes.

The member from York Centre talked about different legislative options we might have. I'm no lawyer; he is. It is incredible to be here with so many people who are so much more intelligent than I am, but to think about what we can do legislatively for this and the difficulties presented by that—I think it's a good conversation to have. Because it is very, very difficult to change people's behaviours, to change their motivations and to change how they act online.

Unfortunately, what I fear is putting those resources into our schools, as has been called for, having those conversations about youth at schools and ignoring what happens on our social media feeds and what we stand by and watch happen to our colleagues' social media feeds. How can we expect different behaviour from our youth when this is the way we treat each other? I fear I'm as guilty of that as anyone else.

I commend the member from Burlington for not being on Twitter anymore. I post on four different social media platforms, but I don't look at any of them. The reason I can't is quite simple: It's because of that. I've learned that social media gives us the ability to be able to read people's thoughts. If you've ever looked in the mirror and had a look at what your own thoughts are, you realize that you really don't want anybody to be able to read your thoughts, but social media does allow us to do that—the thoughts that you have when you're having a bad day, when you're cranky, when you just stubbed your toe, whatever; and then you see something online and in the 10 seconds that it takes to pick up your device, to say something and to put that out there.

A few weeks ago, we tragically had an accident on Highway 24, not far from my house. I've been there before for—it was actually the last week that the House was sitting. A gentleman on a motorcycle was tragically killed at an intersection on Highway 24. I've been there in those

situations. I've been there on my hands and knees, trying to breathe life back into someone with my bunker gear on, and not be able to do that. I knew what my colleagues, what my friends from the fire hall were going through that morning as they went there.

The thoughts that go through your mind as you're doing that—you feel like you're in on some very dirty little secret that no one else is aware of; yet someone's day is just about to get really, really horrible. To hear later from my wife that people in the community held me personally responsible, or intimated that I was personally responsible for that man's death because I was the MPP, was awful.

But this is what we do to each other. So I just don't see it; I don't look at it because I don't want to know what people are thinking in the darkest little thoughts of their hearts, because I like the fact that I can meet someone on the street, that I can say hello and mean it, that I don't have the memory of the awful thing they said about me in the heat of the moment going through my mind as I interact with them, because it allows me to represent them better.

Yet, getting back to our youth, they haven't learned those skills. You send your children out of the house to go to school, to go into life, and there's a little part of your heart that knows, because you've been through it, some of the things that they're going to experience. You wish you could shield them from that.

I was listening to the member from Sudbury about some of the things his son went through being a big kid. I know what that's like. I started grade 9 as one of the shortest kids in class and I was very plump—the things that people do. I can remember one of my friends, when I was suicidal and didn't want to be here any more, he just said, "You have to remember, Willem, that when people are willing to do that to you, it's only because they're so insecure themselves." And I survived, obviously.

But then you send your own kids out and you know what's going to be happening to them. Then you see what's happening on social media and you know—well, actually, you can't know exactly what they're going to be going through. We can sit here and we can talk about legislation, we can talk about policy and we can talk about spending money on things—and again, to echo the member from Burlington, I think at the end of the day, we need to behave better. I need to behave better.

I know the thoughts that have gone through my mind when so-and-so is speaking about this and they're offensive, and sometimes we throw some things back and forth at each other. That's the game and it's fun, but a lot of the time it goes a lot of deeper than that and it's much more personal, it's much more painful. And it's uncalled for. If we're willing to do that here, if we're willing to tolerate what other people are saying about the opposition or the government online and not say anything, what does that make us and how can we expect better from our children?

I think we all need to personally strive—especially since we've all been affected by bullying one way or the other. That's the one clear and certain message that I heard here this afternoon, that we have all been through this. We have all felt that pain. In fact, we all feel it today and we've

become hardened and calloused enough that we try to brush it off. But we all know that "sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me" is a crock, and that provides no comfort when someone has just said something awful about you. When I make the decision that I'm just not going to look because it's better for me not to, is that strength or is that weakness in you? These are the thoughts that go through your mind as you're sitting on the train going home tonight. I don't know. But at the end of the day and why I was so proud to be here today—because I must confess that on the train this morning there was a part of me that would have rather been home, that would have rather seen my kids get on the bus, that would have rather been there when they get off the bus tonight, that would rather be having supper with them right now, and yet it was such an honour to be here today with you all as we talked about these things.

My call here now is that we make a personal commitment—and we can have a discussion about funding and legislation and different programs and things to do—that we all take a good hard long look at ourselves in the mirror and decide what kind of people we're going to be and the example that we're going to show to the people of Ontario and especially to the children of Ontario as we move forward and that we pledge to do better.

So I will close with that, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much for the time. It's good to be here.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I'm proud to rise and speak about Bill 154 from the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville, the Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day Act. If I can go back to when I was in public school, I recall a time when I was bullied. I didn't want to go to school. I would be coming home from school and I'd be attacked by this one boy all the time. Back then, I was a little scrawnier and a little smaller than I am now. But obviously it's different than what bullying is now, of course. The member from Peterborough–Kawartha mentioned he's 50 years of age. I'm closing in on that. It was a different type of bullying back in those days.

1720

But I do remember one individual. I'll just use her first name: Virginia. She was overweight, but she was a lovely person. I knew that she was being bullied because of the way she looked. I was her friend, even though many other people were not her friend. They would pick on her. Fast-forward 20 years after that, at a reunion, people didn't recognize her. "Is that Virginia?" She had lost all the weight that she had gained, but she was still hurt inside. I spoke to her, and she said, "You know, Kevin, I'm still hurting. I'm still traumatized by the pain I felt when I was in school and I was picked on," even though she doesn't look anything like she did back then.

There are signs that parents can also pick up on with their children. If they don't want to take the bus to school, that's a sign. If their marks are going down, that's a sign. If they're sick all the time and they don't want to go to school, that's another sign. If they don't have any friends,

or if they only have a couple of friends, that's also a sign. It is much different now, cyberbullying, than it was when I was in school and when some of the other members were in school back in the 1970s and 1980s. It's much different than it was then.

Online bullying, just like the type of bullying I experienced and Virginia experienced, will last a lifetime. I'm typically not good with names, but I remember her name. I'm more or less visual; I remember someone's face. There are certain things that will stick in your mind, and they'll stick with you forever. These are the types of moments and situations that you'll always remember. If you ever come across someone who's being bullied—this is to the young people out there—and you see it and you hear about it online, be a bigger person than that, because the scars you may not see, but it will last a lifetime, these scars. It's true—people have talked about the bullies now online. Sometimes we don't know who they are. They could be an egg on a Twitter account, or an anonymous account. These people basically are cowards and they're afraid to confront the person face to face.

This bill—that we will be supporting—does, as the members from Sudbury and Nickel Belt mentioned, need tools and support systems, and right now we're not seeing that. We do need those tools and support systems for us to continue supporting it. We can say, "Okay, we support it. There's a day of cyberbullying awareness," but it can't just stop there. We need more to this. We should also be thinking about cyberbullying not just on that one day, of course, but every day of the year, because it does occur every single day.

This is a mental health issue as well. The member from Sudbury also mentioned, from British Columbia and Nova Scotia, the suicides we're all familiar with, and the member from Kiiwetinoong has mentioned some of the suicides in his community. This can hurt, and it can lead one to end their lives, so it's important when we have this day that parents sit down with their children, not just on that day but every day, and explain to them the hurtful nature of cyberbullying and the effects cyberbullying can lead to in the long run.

We didn't really talk too much about gender. In terms of homosexuality, the majority of statistics that are out there say the majority of deaths due to cyberbullying are of homosexuals, not heterosexuals, and one in five young people have experienced cyberbullying. The highest prevalence among them are 15- to 20-year-olds, and one in three in the LGBTQ.

We did talk a little bit about workplace cyberbullying as well. It's a little different than in the education system, as we all know, and it is harder to quantify, Madam Speaker. When someone is bullied online at work, you don't want to speak up because there's a fear of retribution. There's a fear you could lose your job, so you suck it up. You're an adult. But it's just the same as a child in school experiencing cyberbullying. It's no different.

I know we've talked about, as politicians, that this is something we sign up for, so we shouldn't be complaining when we're bullied online, male and female. But it's true

that the majority of the hurtful comments are led towards female politicians. This is something we need to address as well and make sure that we can find a way to stop it.

Of course, we're never going to end cyberbullying; that will continue. Just like we'll never end racism; that will continue. It's just a fact of life. But what we can do is educate, starting with the young, so that they realize that cyberbullying is wrong, it is hurtful, it can lead to death, it can lead to mental illness. We have to start there with our young.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, as I mentioned, we are going to support this cyberbullying day of action, but we have to be committed to doing much more than just saying, "Okay, we're going to support this." We have to actually have concrete ideas, and of course we need to make sure that we have the supports in place to assist people like Virginia, who didn't have the assistance back when I was in school.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you to the House for the opportunity to speak very briefly on this and to thank the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville and all members who have spoken to this bill. It's a very important bill.

If you would have asked people a number of years ago about mental health issues—when I was growing up, nobody would ever admit to having mental health issues; but that has changed. Whether it was Bell Let's Talk Day or just the fact that we all realize that it was the right thing to do, to talk about it, that changed. This bill helps to change that.

It's funny, I think we've all faced this at some point in our lives. I know, when I was a young Italian kid, many, many years ago, when I went to school, I didn't speak English. I spoke Italian when I started school. But I clearly remember when I was a young kid, many of those first few years, you would be sworn at and called a wop or a spic. You would be spit on. You were supposed to just handle it.

I remember actually talking to my father about it. His advice to me at the time—bearing in mind my father was 5 foot 5. He was a hairdresser, and later he made pizzas. His advice to me at the time, because it was so bad, was, "Let them think your dad is a mobster and they'll stop." He used to come to parent-teacher interviews with a hat on and a long, black trench coat, and it stopped. But what a sad thing to think—that you have to pretend to be something that you detest in order to get people to stop bullying you.

We even notice it in our own transition—and I'm guilty of this, too. I'm ashamed to say it, but when I was growing up—sometimes your parents would ask you about kids in your school and who you sit beside. You would explain who you sat beside based on, "I sit beside the Portuguese kid," or "I sit beside the Filipino kid." We had one Filipino kid in my school in Markham, St. Patrick's—one Filipino kid in the whole school. "Who do you sit beside?" "The Filipino kid." Now I ask my kids and you never hear that.

They don't describe things the way we used to that seemed to be normal for us.

1730

As the member for Brampton North said, and a lot of members have said, the nature of cyberbullying and of bullying has changed. When you came home at my age, your house was a refuge. There was one phone in the house, and usually my sister was on it all the time so there was nobody who was going to bully me on the phone. So that was fine, but you had those many hours of refuge when you didn't have to worry about it.

Now, as a parent, you have to worry constantly, and kids have to worry about it constantly. Some of the members have talked about TikTok and some of the throwaway comments that people make to each other. We have to be doubly sure, as parents, that we watch out for each other, and we have to also set an example.

I get really upset sometimes when I hear people talk about what we do in this place—and sometimes we are guilty of this as well: We reduce what we do; we diminish what we do. I always tell people, in this House, we debate very fiercely on a lot of things, and that's good. As the member for Sudbury said, good debate is important and it should be fierce—but we never debase ourselves to bullying. I'm glad that we don't diminish that.

When I was a federal member, I tended to irritate people quite a bit—and I might do that here as well. I remember at one point, I was getting a thousand emails a day. The Twitter account was just outrageous. We could not keep up with the comments. It can be very, very frustrating.

I remember at one point, a nationally renowned comic did a Twitter thing. I blocked him because he had said something I thought was offensive. And I make no excuse for it. I know that can cause a lot of people—if you say something offensive, something stupid, you are blocked from my feed. I make no apologies for that. Just being elected does not mean that I have to listen to stupidity on my Twitter. If you're offensive, you get blocked. If you swear, you're blocked. But this one comedian took offence to that so he started a campaign, "Twitter Paul and say he's a tool. Paul Calandra is a tool." Many of you may think that, and some of my own caucus may think that, but I didn't find it funny. I don't think it's funny when a national news media person says, "Twitter @PaulCalandra that he's a tool," when it's picked up by the national news media, by the channel that this person appeared on and talked about as something really, really, quite funny. Did it bother me? Sure. But it bothered me more to think that my kids would then have to one day read it—and they're starting to read some of these things. "Well, what was this person talking about?" So we have to do our part as well.

What struck me most about that when this started happening, as bad as my feed was—and I know some members have touched on this—my female colleagues on both sides of the House, their feed was horrifying—horrifying. It gets me. It pisses me off, Madam Speaker, and I know we're trying to be—these are people who by and large are cowards.

I withdraw—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I appreciate that. I was thinking about letting it go, though, as a female politician.

Hon. Paul Calandra: It irritates me because these people are cowards, and social media has been a licence for cowards to attack people in a way that they would never do so if their face had to be put in public. I know a couple of members have talked about bots and so on, and we sometimes, as politicians, say we have to take it because we're elected to do so. I disagree. I don't think anybody should have to take it, and certainly not our children.

I thank the member for bringing this bill forward. I know when I was a kid, I always thought I knew better and I could find my way around my parents knowing what I was doing. I always thought, "Gosh, when I'm a dad, I'll know everything. There's no way my kids will be able to trick me," but holy mackerel—I think it was the member for Mississauga–Cooksville who talked about it. Once you give them a phone, it's almost impossible to know, to really understand all of the ways in which they can be tracked, in which they can be verbally assaulted, in which they can be made fun of, and just how hurtful it is.

Again, I thank the honourable member. I thank all the members who have spoken on this. I think we should do it more often on this. We have to make this as embarrassing for people as it is comfortable now for us to speak about mental health issues. We have to talk about this as often as—we have to make this as bad as racism is. This has to be equal to that. This is something that should be offensive to all members.

I think the debate here today has been as much uplifting as it is sad that we all have such tales to tell, and that they're very unique in many circumstances.

So I congratulate the member for bringing it forward. I know a lot of other members have talked about this a lot—and this member just happens to have his ballot date now. Thank you very much, and again, congratulations to all members. The quality of debate on this today has been great.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am also glad to be able to stand in this Legislature and add my voice and some of my own perspective on Bill 154, Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day Act, as brought forward by the member opposite.

This has been a worthwhile debate; many of them are, Speaker, but for the reasons that we've heard, there are personal parts to this—that maybe we can grow and appreciate a little bit more about each other, and by extension, each other's families and communities. I think, as we have heard, there is so much in terms of the long-lasting impact of bullying, of harassment. I'm sitting here and my colleague from Parkdale–High Park was just showing me some of the vitriol that she has personally had.

I'm reminded of some of the unpleasantness that I, too, have encountered. I remember the first one after being elected, the very first comment on Facebook under a

picture. I remember the picture; I had a new purse in the picture, which is why I remember that picture. Someone had commented underneath, “How can we expect anything from someone who can’t even dress herself?” I remember thinking, “What? That’s dumb.” I’ve never forgotten it. It wasn’t a violent comment; it was just a dumb one. I thought, “I actually don’t hate that outfit”—but what a stupid moment that had an impact. I’ve gotten far worse than that, but that’s just to show that people drop things all over the place, these—as the government House leader called them—throwaway comments. But people pick those up and they carry them.

So you imagine a child who cannot escape comments or the relentless attacks. I remember when the police came to speak to children at the school that I was teaching at. I was teaching at Glen Street, and an officer came to speak to children about cyberbullying. We were in the library and talking about it. The conversation ended up diverging a bit from cyberbullying—because I’ve never loved the word “bullying.” I’ve personally always felt it wasn’t big enough for the impact that it has. Others would disagree. It carries weight. For children who grow up understanding the word “bullying,” it carries the weight for them. But the word that I would describe, if they were over 18, might be “harassment.”

The member from Durham was talking earlier about making changes to the Criminal Code, about actually looking at how we address this. It’s not just enough to point at it and say it’s bad. What should those consequences be? We’re not talking about hurt feelings and the opportunity for our kids to grow a thicker skin, like the member from Sudbury talked about how he had to do. We’re talking about criminal damage, really. As the member from Kiiwetinoong reminded us, it can have very final impacts. Some children don’t get to struggle and grow for the rest of their lives and hopefully overcome it. Some children end their lives at that point, and never get the chance.

So bullying is harassment, as far as I’m concerned, at the child level, and I think that calling it what it is, or understanding it for the impact that it has, is an important part of that. It can be threatening. It’s always unwanted. It affects self-esteem. It affects people’s behaviour.

We have things that we say—and I say “we” as society or as parents or as adults or as people who have been through it—to help us understand that those who hurt, hurt others. That is not an excuse for behaviour. It maybe helps us understand a bit. When I was an educator—I guess you’re always an educator if you are an educator—to recognize that with a bully in your classroom there’s often something behind that. It’s important for them to have a different kind of support, to not just stop the behaviour, but address the behaviour and maybe change that behaviour and support that child. But when your whole life is that, what do we do?

1740

The member has brought forward this private member’s bill to stop cyberbullying, and that’s important. To the member: I don’t know that I love the third Friday in June.

A friendly amendment: If you can maybe also have it in September—that idea of a fresh start in the year, looking ahead at the school year—and then something at the end of the school year on their way out the door as they’re heading into their online lives a little more full-time, that reminder. It doesn’t matter, really, when you do it; it is all the time.

We’ve heard from the member from Nickel Belt that it is persistent. I would say it’s relentless as well, that it is constant. It used to be—well, I don’t know; I think it still is, but when we think about bullying on the playground, and we’ve talked about in the old days or whatnot, that it was at school and then you maybe had that respite at home, that you had a sanctuary at home. That does not exist anymore. It follows them. And it isn’t when you’re sitting in front of your computer that you’re at risk; it’s when the notifications go off on your watch. It’s when your phone goes off. You want to watch something, you want to play your video game, and you’ve got people online—the drive-by bullying on the video games, because that is also interactive in the broader world. It is everywhere in everything that children or young adults or adults do. We’re all living online. We’re learning online. We’re terrified of it, but there’s a need to participate in it.

My father doesn’t have a cellphone, which blows my mind. I do not know how he functions in the world; arguably, he does, but without a cellphone. I don’t know of too many other people who don’t have access or a connection to that constant online. My father is on the Internet; don’t worry. He’s online, sometimes too much, but children can’t necessarily escape it.

Having taught in areas where there are different opportunities—areas that have poverty, new Canadians, that have cultural diversity or background diversity—we’ve got all sorts of folks, as we all do, across our communities. I’m going to ask you something: What will that look like right now, with everybody living online in a different way?

At the beginning of the pandemic, when we started doing the Zoom calls—there was a time before we knew that word, or it meant something different. These Zoom calls or these online forums where you see all the faces and backgrounds—it’s kind of fun. We talk about it. It builds community, when you see somebody and say, “Oh, I love what you’ve done in the kitchen.” Or their teenager takes milk out of the fridge and drinks it in the background, and you have a laugh. Or you get to see how the puppy is growing up, or whatever. You’re learning more about the people you’re interacting with.

What happens to the kid who is not inviting friends to their home? They’re now forced to have all of their classmates see over their shoulder and see that maybe they don’t have nice things in their house. Or maybe they see that there are mental health challenges in the home. Or they see a parent or an older sibling who maybe they don’t want their friends to see. We’ve all got stuff at home. So what happens to those kids when their reality is that now all of their classmates can see their home life and can make judgments? What happens when the teacher is disconnected temporarily and there’s a free-for-all? What

happens when we figure out some of these cool platforms for online education—and there are some pretty cool platforms and opportunities, the small groups and whatever.

It will be a challenge for the school boards to figure out how to monitor and how to have those accountability layers. We're going to all have to grow together and be vigilant and be conscientious and careful with some of those pieces, and unfortunately, we can't figure that out now. We do have to watch some of that unfold and figure out how to support it. But we need to watch for and do that.

I know I'm all over the map, but it has been such an interesting conversation in this room. It has really reminded me of a number of pieces.

The member from Durham and I share Oshawa. She's got the north end; I have got the majority of it. There are a lot of us in here from the Durham region. I know the government says there's the Durham four, but I think it's the Durham seven, technically, if I'm going to include myself in that. Anyway, a lot of us know the challenges across Durham region, especially when it comes to human trafficking. We know that we, like Windsor, like Peel, like many other areas, have major challenges in our community, safety challenges when it comes to, most of the time, young girls.

As the member from Durham was remarking, she and I have both done ride-alongs with the Durham police, the human trafficking unit—it is a remarkable unit. They do a lot of partnership with community agencies and organizations. I serve on the anti-human trafficking task force with a number of the shelters, agencies, groups who are trying to keep track of this problem and figure out how to support, how to prevent—all of that has to come together as a community.

I've been really proud to do some work with victim services. It's just quiet, in-my-spare-time work—and all of us know, in this room, we don't have a lot of that—to take a look at the existing school curriculum and figure out age-appropriate places where you can pull some of the curriculum, and victim services can put together, maybe, supportive resources for schools and for school boards.

It's not always about sexual exploitation and human trafficking, but about how to be safe online and how to recognize some of the predatory behaviours, whether it's not really a friend if you haven't met them in real life and you wouldn't take them home to meet your family, or whatever it is—age-appropriate, about how to be safe online—because there is so much, everywhere. That exploitation, when we hear horrible stories about human trafficking, stems from a number of things—but it stems from the opportunity. The opportunity can be in real life; it can be online. Online is real life.

Predators, regardless of what they are hoping to accomplish, prey on those they see as vulnerable. If we have children who don't have the support at home, or who don't have a friend group or who can't find kindness anywhere in their lives because of cyberbullying or bullying generally, there are people waiting in the wings, folks, to

prey on those individuals. We do have to connect all of these dots. We can't think that they all happen separately.

There are online resources. The member from Sudbury said earlier in response to some of the comments across the way that when we talk about some of the awful things we have the opportunity to know or responsibility to know in this role and we share it in this House, people may criticize us and say, "Well, you shouldn't say those things, because people might get ideas." The fact of the matter is, there are many people with ideas. If they are a predator, they are going to find ways to be successful in preying on someone. By the time we identify a way that they do harm, by the time we figure that out, they're already onto the next, folks, which is why we really do need to give our students, our children and our families the tools that they need to recognize harm when they find it.

I've got so many different notes here. We've talked about living online, learning online. Bullying used to be the people you know. Now it can be the people you don't know—whether it's anonymity or it's the friend of a friend. But there's also the threat of that. When you are being targeted online, you know that every single person you know and every single person you've never met can see that—that that trail of harm is permanent, that if someone used to tell a bad story about you, or you did something embarrassing, or you embarrassed yourself in the classroom or the hallway, people might tell that story and you'd be embarrassed, but now they've got a video of that thing you did, and it will haunt you for the rest of your life and it will harm you for the rest of your life.

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That's the reality now. You make a poor choice, you make a mistake, you do something you know is wrong, but you just hope it will go away. Somebody's got that photographic evidence. Somebody's got that video. How do you live with that? How many of you in this room are grateful that your university or your teenage years were not recorded?

I was a goody-goody my whole life. There were moments, but basically, I've always been pretty much of a rule-follower. I've got some issues. I admit that.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: No way. Really? I didn't know that.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Hey, I hear you, Mr. Nicholls.

Anyway, the point is, I still look back and I think, "Oh, that was kind of dumb. I'm really glad that that was when photos were not digital yet." I have that on my film and it's in my album and there ain't nobody going to see that choice of whatever it was I did.

The point is, we have the opportunity to run for office because of each opportunity that has led to this one.

What about the kid who knows that if they ever made a name for themselves, somebody would dredge up that picture, somebody would dredge up that video? Imagine living your whole life with that hanging over your head.

I think more and more that online safety and whatnot is important, but we can't just put it on the kids to learn the rules, behave themselves and make good choices when, as we've heard, there are so many models out in the world.

When we look at world leaders, when we look at influencers in the music world, when we look at artists we value, when we look at whoever your icons are, people watch their behaviour, and so when we see, I'll say, important people or influential folks who diminish a group of people or who say things like women shouldn't be believed or who say awful things against—whether it's our veterans or against certain neighbours, people hear that, they see that and it reinforces it. It's hard to avoid. We can't just put this on the kids and say, "Let's remind them to be nice online." I used to tell my kids there's nothing worse you could be than unkind, because unkind leads to everything else. That's a pat thing to say, but if we as adults, if we as role models, if we as elected leaders don't live by that, it's really hard to have somebody who is watching you do something different than what we lay out for them.

I've had a couple of times in the past couple of months—not just the pandemic, actually; I guess the last year—some moments to reflect. I have lived in many places, like many of us have. I grew up in Ontario, and then my dad's job took us to California. I lived there for grade 8 and four years of high school, and then I came back and did university in Ontario. While I was there, I went to Saugus High School. Saugus High School is in the Santa Clarita Valley, a Santa Clarita Valley unlike the TV show. The TV show is not a nice depiction. Unfortunately, Saugus High, which I have wonderful memories of, was in the news back in November because there was a school shooting. There was a young man, on his 16th birthday, who shot five and killed two and turned the gun on himself. Still, anything that you look at, there's no clear motive or message or note, and that's something that—I don't know how that community will ever be the same, or many communities where we have school shootings and the aftermath. The aftermath can never be measured and neither can the loss.

Oftentimes, when we hear about school shootings, Speaker, it does come from unbelievable pain or it does connect to bullying—and not to say that all cases lead to that, but it leads to immeasurable consequences that shape our children, that shape our adults, that ultimately shape our society and how we see ourselves and how we shape the world around us.

I think that, as we've all said during this debate, it is incumbent upon us to be the best versions of ourselves, not just for our communities but, honestly, for the future of the communities—but also to challenge our friends and families to be a bit kinder.

This bill is a perfect place to talk about prevention and awareness, but also that interconnectedness of all of our experiences. We have a lot of responsibility to take and connect this and go that one step further and make sure

that we resource and fund and support what we hear from experts, and we make sure that the world is a safer, better place for our children, for their children, for all of our friends and neighbours.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'll be very brief. Again, I want to thank our member for Mississauga East–Cooksville for bringing forth Bill 154, the cyberbullying bill.

We talk about cyberbullying, but what about oral bullying? You see a lot of that. Back in my day, we didn't have the Internet, we didn't have Facebook, we didn't have all the other fancy stuff that they have today, and so it was neighbourhood teasing, it was neighbourhood bullying per se and, to some degree, that still kind of goes on even now.

Again, I think it's very important—people have said to me, "Rick, what's it like to be in government?" I said, "Well, having spent seven years in opposition, my shoulders are broader, my skin is thicker, but every once in a while somebody finds my Achilles heel and I say 'ouch.'" That's because on Facebook, on Twitter, people will attack because they have something that they want to get out there, and they can hide behind that screen.

I really appreciate the fact that our member has brought forward this cyberbullying bill, and I hope people will take it to heart.

I was always raised that if you can't say something nice about someone, don't say anything at all. I've tried to teach that to my kids. Do I get teased? Of course I get teased. I used to get called Nicholls Pickles. They were fighting words. Now I say my name as being a social conservative, being a fiscal conservative—I say Nicholls, yes, being a fiscal conservative, it's "nickels, not gold" and whatnot. I just throw it right back and have some fun with it.

Again, I know time is short, so I will sit down and allow you to conduct what you need to conduct, Speaker. Thanks for your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Further debate?

Mr. Rasheed has moved third reading of Bill 154, An Act to proclaim Stop Cyberbullying in Ontario Day.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? It's carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1758.

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Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud—Weston	
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Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
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Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
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Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
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Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
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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
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