

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 192

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N^o 192

1st Session
42nd Parliament
Tuesday
6 October 2020

1^{re} session
42^e législature
Mardi
6 octobre 2020

Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Todd Decker

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House Publications and Language Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
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Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1180-2987

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 6 October 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 6 octobre 2020

The House met at 1015.

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

Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'm proud to represent Kensington Market, one of the most vibrant and diverse neighbourhoods in our city. Kensington's unique shops and restaurants attract tourists and artists from around the world. But COVID-19 has forced many business owners to give up and shut down. People like Julian. Julian is the owner of Model Citizen, a store that sells unique, made-in-Toronto clothing and goods. Julian did exactly what public health requested and closed his store during the first wave of COVID-19. His landlord agreed to apply to the federal rent subsidy program, but after months of waiting, his landlord backed out, which meant Julian had just days to come up with \$20,000 in rent. He can't do it.

Julian has been a small business owner in Kensington for 13 years, and now he's closing his doors permanently, just like AAamazing Salad, Bed and Better Living, Euro-lins, Krepez Café and Bar, Moo Frites, Pink Canary, Sole Survivor, Search and Rescued and San Cosme. These are just a few of the businesses in Kensington that are closing down. And what is happening in Kensington is happening all across my riding and all across our city, from Bloor to Ossington to Dundas to College. We're losing main street, we're losing jobs and we're losing the vibrancy that makes our neighbourhoods unique and special.

I'm urging this government to step up and help businesses get through this pandemic. Expand who is eligible for the eviction ban. Provide direct rent relief for businesses in need. The future of our economic recovery depends on this moment.

ILLEGAL DRUGS

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I want to compliment the great job our law enforcement does in our communities to serve and protect. One key aspect includes keeping illegal drugs and illegally grown drugs, such as cannabis, from hitting our streets and getting into the hands of our youth, plus those who attempt to distribute said illegal drugs.

As many of you may already know, Chatham-Kent-Leamington is home to Ontario's largest greenhouse population. These greenhouses are known to supply various delicious fruits and vegetables to Ontarians all over the province. Sadly, it seems that not everyone has good intentions to grow legal vegetation.

On September 16, the Chatham-Kent Police Service intelligence unit seized over \$7.3-million worth of illegally-grown cannabis, making this the largest drug bust Chatham-Kent has ever seen. Then, on September 23, police were also able to get a warrant and seize approximately \$3,000 worth of suspected methamphetamines, packaging materials and digital scales. Furthermore, police seized again an additional \$36,000 worth of cocaine and other illegal drugs just last week. This is a great success for the Chatham-Kent Police Service, as we are able to keep these illegally obtained substances off the streets and out of the hands of vulnerable people.

1020

Police and city council members are encouraging people to call Crime Stoppers or their local police if they ever suspect illegal activity. Together, we are able to put our foot down, claim a victory against illegal drugs and continue to make our communities safer.

SENIORS' HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Dear government: I think it's time for real talk, real talk about care for older adults in Ontario. Last week, you asked everyone to pitch in and help their loved ones, and the people of Kitchener Centre are doing just that, but based on the calls I'm getting in my office, they need your help.

So I've been thinking: What is one way that you can commit to do what families actually need, so that they feel loved and cared for and heard? The answer: You can support Bill 196, my call for an independent seniors' advocate in Ontario. When you support my bill, you're developing an authentic circle of care around older adults across this province. You're providing them, their families and the ones who care for them with a space to raise concerns when things aren't going right and to report on victories when the changes they need are finally completed.

When you support my bill, you're being proactive in the care that you deliver to older adults, because you're listening to the experts who have been telling us that we can and must do better for older adults in Ontario.

When you support my bill, you will be giving the older adults in your lives and in ours the greatest amount of

gratitude. You will tell them that you care with your actions, not only with your words.

I'm looking forward to your support on October 19, when we come together to debate my private member's bill. I know that the people of Kitchener Centre will be watching, along with all Ontarians, as we take a historic leap of faith together.

Now that is real talk.

Signed, Ontario.

ONTARIO AGRICULTURE WEEK

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It's an honour to rise today to recognize this being Ontario Agriculture Week. My predecessor, former MPP Bert Johnson, took this initiative 22 years ago to establish Ontario Agriculture Week, to set aside time to thank those who work hard every single day to grow some of the best food in the world, which we get to enjoy every day here in Ontario.

Each morning, farmers on nearly 50,000 farms across our province wake up to plant, grow and harvest more than 200 varieties of food that are produced in Ontario annually. Ontario's hard-working farmers continue to provide families with fresh fruits, vegetables, high-quality meats, poultry and fish, as well as nutritious eggs and dairy, delicious honey, maple syrup and world-class wines.

Now more than ever, we must support local farmers and the communities that put food on our kitchen tables. When consumers choose local food, they are helping to build a strong farm and food sector, which supports good jobs throughout our province.

During this year's agriculture week, as much as any other time of the year, we are grateful for what they do for this province, and as a government we are proud to support them and our agri-food sector. On behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and our entire caucus, I want to thank each and every farmer in this province for being the agri-food heroes we so depend on.

MADE IN DUNDAS BOX

Ms. Sandy Shaw: In my riding there are many business districts located in historic areas like Dundas, Ancaster and Westdale. These are delightful main streets full of local retailers, services and restaurants. We all know small businesses across Ontario were hard hit by COVID-19 in the spring shutdown; they're now open again and working hard to create safe and unique shopping experiences.

A great example of the entrepreneurship of Ontarians is the Made in Dundas Box. Our local Dundas Museum partnered with local businesses to launch the Made in Dundas Box. Each box features a surprise collection of locally sourced hand-picked items from the wonderful businesses in the community: Village Bakery, Nellie James gourmet foods, Mickey McGuire's Cheese and Weir's lavender, just to name a few.

This is a wonderful way to support our local small businesses and to raise funds for an important cultural organization. The proceeds from each box will give five young

students a chance to visit the museum and a chance to participate in their award-winning educational program.

This program was so successful that it sold out. But for those of you who missed out, don't worry; the next Made in Dundas Box will be launching soon.

ONTARIO AGRICULTURE WEEK

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's Ontario Agriculture Week, and I want to encourage people to support our local farmers by buying local at our limited gatherings this weekend.

I also want to take a moment to talk about the amazing work by local food groups in Guelph, like The SEED, who are working hard to connect local farmers with the most vulnerable—during COVID, they've delivered over 100,000 nutritious food boxes via contactless delivery; like 10C, the Smart Cities initiative, the University of Guelph and Harve\$t Impact, who have a plan to Grow Back Better: to make Guelph the first city where no one goes without healthy food.

It's a bold initiative where we are taking the problems of food waste and food access to create solutions, to create jobs, to build a more regenerative food system that doesn't exhaust our planet. Speaker, excuse the pun, but there is hunger for these local solutions. I'm urging the government to protect farmland, to use your procurement power to support local, sustainable farmers by buying local food for public institutions and to invest in programs that keep people fed.

We need to use the lessons from the pandemic to make us more resilient. I want to thank the food organizations in Guelph who are showing us the way forward, and I want to thank all those Ontario farmers who are growing such delicious, healthy food for all of us.

SCARBOROUGH HEALTH NETWORK

Mr. Aris Babikian: Our government's investment into the Scarborough Health Network emphasizes our commitment to improving and optimizing health care for all. Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to visit our health care institutions and relay good news, especially during these trying times. On one such visit last Friday, I joined my Scarborough colleagues at Scarborough Health Network to announce the allocation of \$4,696,433 for the 2020-21 year to SHN through the Health Infrastructure Renewal Fund. This funding will support the roof, carpet and window replacements, as well as assist in the replacement of the nurse call system and the Birchmount hospital chiller and cooling tower. The funding will help Scarborough hospitals, including Birchmount hospital, to continue the amazing work they are doing to keep our community healthy and safe. The above announcement is in addition to the \$500,000 funding provided to Birchmount to help them plan the renovation of the existing 11,000 square feet of the emergency department, in addition to a new 14,000 square feet.

I would like to take the opportunity to commend SHN doctors, nurses and front-line health care workers for their

commitment and sacrifices to safeguard the health of our community. They are the real heroes of the COVID pandemic. They went beyond the call of duty and reached out to the long-term-care centres, retirement homes and assisted living facilities to care for the most vulnerable and prevent the spread of the pandemic.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm watching the clock and occasionally allowing both sides to go a few seconds over.

Members' statements.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Jamie West: I recently met with members of my community who belong to various recovery and addiction 12-step programs. During the first wave of COVID-19, when the province was abruptly shut down, their ability to hold in-person group support meetings was halted. The isolation and the inability to have in-person fellowship and support had a devastating effect on their members. I was told that in my city of Sudbury, the number of overdoses has also climbed.

During this meeting, one participant told me that even though they are now able to meet safely in person, 30% of the support group simply has never returned. It's troubling, because 12-step recovery and addiction programs can increase success rates by as much as 18% and 25%. With the number of COVID-19 cases on the rise and an expectation of a second wave soon to come, advocates of 12-step programs are concerned that their ability to meet in person will be cancelled again.

1030

Last spring, decisions had to be made quickly, but fortunately, hindsight is 20/20. That's why, before any future decisions are made, these advocates are joining with others to make the government aware of the impact that the first shutdown had on them. They have one simple request, Speaker: that the government include 12-step recovery and addiction programs as part of the list of essential services for future shutdowns. This would ensure that with proper controls in place, their ability to have in-person fellowship and support could continue, especially when it might be needed most.

I support their opinion, and I'll reach out to the Premier as well as the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to ask for their support as well.

FIRE IN RICHMOND HILL

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Today, I rise in the House as a very proud MPP for my riding of Richmond Hill. On July 26, a fire ripped through a townhouse complex and destroyed nearly 20 units, displacing several families. Among those is a woman by the name of Simone Bennett, with two sons, eight and nine years old. They lost everything, Mr. Speaker. They only had the clothing on their backs. Tragically, the fire destroyed their home and the family car.

While she moved into a shelter with the children, her friend Natalie Beharry set up a GoFundMe page for Ms. Bennett, to help her to raise funds to cover her first and last months' rent and obtain furnishings, clothing and basic needs. Mr. Speaker, I'm so proud and happy to report that almost \$16,000 of the \$18,000 goal has been raised by this community.

I would like to thank Ms. Beharry for taking this initiative and wish Ms. Bennett all the very best as she begins a new chapter.

I'd also like to thank the Richmond Hill Fire and Emergency Services, York region community and social services as well as the Red Cross for their assistance to these families.

HOME RUNS FOR HOSPICE

Mr. Will Bouma: I rise in the House today to acknowledge a wonderful community event which took place in Brantford this past Saturday, October 3. The first annual Home Runs for Hospice game at the Arnold Anderson Stadium featured an alumni roster of Brantford Red Sox players, our local inter-county baseball league team. While spectators were limited, the game was broadcast on several local stations.

For well over 100 consecutive years, baseball games have been played at this stadium, which is an impressive track record—until COVID threatened this tradition. In order to continue this century-long institution, Saturday's celebratory scrimmage game was organized.

It was also organized to honour several incredible volunteers who have contributed so extensively to baseball in Brantford. The game was played in memory of Jamie Corke and Tom Waelchli, who both passed away in the last year. Sue Harris was also recognized, and she was able to be there for Saturday's game. They have all served Brantford Minor Baseball, the Brantford Red Sox and the community of Brantford through their dedication and love for the game.

Especially meaningful to me was that this Home Runs for Hospice game was played to raise funds for our local Stedman Community Hospice. While the pandemic has changed so much in our lives, it has not diminished our community spirit and its love for the game of baseball.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our members' statements for this morning.

WEARING OF PINK MASKS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to recognize the Minister of Health on a point of order.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Speaker, I'm seeking unanimous consent for members to wear pink masks in recognition of National Metastatic Breast Cancer Awareness Day, which is next Tuesday, as well as Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

I would also like to thank Rethink Breast Cancer for channelling their inner Ontario spirit in making these

masks, which will help raise awareness for women who have metastatic breast cancer.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Health is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to allow the members to wear pink masks today in recognition of National Metastatic Breast Cancer Awareness Day and Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Agreed? Agreed.

2011 ONTARIO GENERAL ELECTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Hamilton Mountain has a point of order.

Miss Monique Taylor: It gives me great pride to congratulate the class of 2011. October 6 is the ninth anniversary of us being elected to the 40th Parliament.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Congratulations to all of you.

It is now time for oral questions.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

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

Ontarians are anxious, and rightfully so, about the second wave of COVID-19. Thousands have lost their lives, businesses along main streets across our province have shut down and families have struggled to make ends meet and to try to keep their kids learning. Yet the Premier insists that everything is going to plan. Yesterday, he even claimed Ontario's testing was the envy of the country, even as underfunded and overloaded labs reduced service and scrambled to try to meet demand. So does the Premier really think his bargain-basement scheme is something to brag about?

Hon. Doug Ford: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the testing that we're doing. I just informed the Leader of the Opposition—I know it's kind of tough; they have trouble with numbers sometimes—that we tested 42,000 people yesterday. That's 42,000 people. We're leading the entire country in testing. We're 38% of the population; we're 52% of the testing. We're doing well over four million tests so far. We have another 100 pharmacies coming on board to help out.

Now, people are happy. More and more people I have talked to, they're happy about setting up a schedule, that they can make an appointment; they don't have to wait in line. Again, I can't wait for this rapid test to be approved from Health Canada. It's going to be a game changer, but we will continue pumping out the tests—42,000 tests yesterday and 38,000 the day before. So we're increasing testing. Our goal is to hit 50,000.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Toronto Public Health, experts in the medical field across Ontario and the Ontario Hospital Association have pleaded with this Premier to take a

step back and actually listen to their advice. They want him to do what's right and take every measure possible to protect the lives of Ontarians. Dr. de Villa of Toronto Public Health said she has sent suggestions all along to the Premier and his officials. Yet instead of working with them, the Premier is refusing to listen, just as he did all summer while hospitals, labs and long-term-care homes were pleading for the government to prepare for the second wave. When is the Premier going to start listening?

Hon. Doug Ford: We take everyone's advice. I respect the OHA. I respect the nurses. I respect all the information. I even respect the NDP and the Liberals when they come up with constructive ideas.

Mr. Speaker, I can't sit back without seeing proper evidence. And they're supposed to be a party of helping the little guy? They want me to shut down restaurants that these families have put their life savings in, that 99% of them—or probably even higher than 99%—are following the rules. They're practising social distancing. They're putting hand sanitizer out. They're putting dividers out. We've made sure that when people go in, we have contact tracing of all the people. We've cut the tables down to six. We reduced the hours of serving alcohol, at 11 o'clock that it's going to stop.

My job as Premier is to protect the people, protect the little people that have sit there—in opening their restaurants, trying to survive. The NDP want to close them down. They want to ruin their lives. I'm not here to ruin—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Doing what Ontario needs to get through the second wave means doing more than just the bare minimum. The Premier's own public officials begged for a better testing and lab capacity plan, but the Premier and his team just didn't want to spend the money. Now the Premier is, once again, hoping to save a buck while the pandemic spreads.

When will the Premier realize that his attempts to cut corners, delay decisions and save money are making the second wave worse than it needs to be?

Hon. Doug Ford: There's one thing this government hasn't done, is cut funding. We have increased funding. We're up over \$30 billion now, supporting businesses, supporting families in need. That's what we're going to continue to do.

But, Mr. Speaker, the best way to help people, the very best way, is for everyone to follow the guidelines. Everyone is in this together. We have to make sure, as long as the numbers maintain where they are—or go lower, because they dropped again, Mr. Speaker. I have to protect people's livelihood.

1040

What they're forgetting is mental health. Have you ever run a business, the Leader of the Opposition? Have you ever had to meet a payroll? Have you ever had to meet a payroll for two people? Is your mortgage dependent, is your rent dependent on them making sure that you get the sales in? The answer is no, because you have been on the

public dole for the last 20 years down here. That's the reason—

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

The next question.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I have another serious question for the Premier. Perhaps he'll answer it in a serious way. Yesterday, the Premier said that he was avoiding new, desperately needed health measures because he wanted "to exhaust every ... avenue before I ruin someone's life." Well, it's too late. COVID-19 has ruined thousands and thousands of lives in our province, and thousands of small businesses have also been ruined because the Premier bungled his response to COVID-19. To make matters worse, he is failing to provide the support that main street businesses need to stay afloat.

So if this Ford government is truly worried for small businesses and all the little guys that the Premier likes to talk about who work for those small businesses, why has he not put direct supports in place to protect small businesses during a second wave?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through the support of the federal government and ourselves, we've put billions and billions of dollars for small businesses. I just want to remind the Leader of the Opposition, I personally led the charge to get more money off the federal government, and if I didn't keep pushing them, we wouldn't be getting the extra \$4 billion.

And about exhausting: Absolutely, I'm not ready to go willy-nilly and just make a decision and ruin tens of thousands of people's lives and shut down absolutely everything that the NDP want to do. You're right; you're 100%: One thing where you're right, Leader of the Opposition, is I will exhaust every avenue that I possibly can to be able to put food on people's tables, to be able to pay the rent, pay their mortgage and take care of their kids while we go through this crisis. We're there to support them, we're there to get them back on their feet and help them out any way we can.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Talk's cheap, and apparently so is the Premier. Instead of offering a plan to directly—

Interjections.

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

I'm going to caution all the members on their language. Obviously, that remark caused disorder in the House. I would ask all members to keep their language temperate.

Start the clock. The Leader of the Opposition, please place your question.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Instead of offering a plan to directly help small businesses struggling with rent, which they have been asking for since April, the Ford government created a scheme that was impossible to access: Of the \$3 billion that was supposed to help small businesses

and protect jobs, \$2 billion of it is still in the bank. And now, that program has actually completely expired.

Small businesses and working people have been begging for direct supports to help with the rent and make the bills. Why has the Premier pinched pennies and refused to step up?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Since the onset of this pandemic, we have ensured that we have been speaking to and listening to small business owners. Based on that consultation, we have been providing direct support to small businesses. Whether it's in the form of the CECRA program, the emergency rent relief to the tune of almost \$1 billion, in conjunction with the federal government; whether it's investing in programs like Digital Main Street, a \$57-million investment with \$2,500 grants for businesses to pivot to digital e-commerce models; or whether it's providing electricity relief to the tune of \$175 million, this government remains committed to supporting small businesses. Whether it was before the pandemic, when we brought forward a 9% decrease in small business taxes, or whether it's during this pandemic, small businesses can always rely on this government to support them.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, the support they've gotten so far has led to thousands and thousands of businesses having to close their doors permanently here in the province of Ontario. At every single turn, the Ford government has dithered and delayed, trying to save a buck instead of saving lives and jobs, whether it's hospitals, labs and long-term-care homes waiting for investments to fight the second wave or working people and small businesses desperate for support to keep their doors open and pay the bills.

If we want to beat that COVID-19 and flatten the curve, we need a government that actually steps up to the plate. When will we see the desperately needed direct investments to save Main Street and protect jobs during the second wave of COVID-19?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Premier to reply.

Hon. Doug Ford: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is speaking out of both sides of her mouth. One second the one question is, close all the businesses and—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the Premier to withdraw.

Hon. Doug Ford: I withdraw. Sorry, Speaker.

She's sending a message out there to close the businesses in one question and then that we need to open them all up in the other question, so I'm not too sure where the Leader of the Opposition is going. Our goal is to always make sure we do everything in our power to keep businesses afloat. The best way we can support business is for everyone to follow the guidelines, for everyone to make sure that we bring down the numbers, and we don't have to close anything down.

But again, it goes back to these companies that are struggling, that are holding on by their fingernails. We have to be there to support them. We have been there to support them, no matter if it's making sure that they don't have to be threatened by their landlords—which we stood up for, to make sure that we protected tenants, so that they aren't able to kick the tenants out because they can't afford rent. We put in billions of dollars—

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

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Sara Singh: My question is for the Premier. Ontario's hospitals have been a cornerstone in keeping our communities safe and providing life-saving care throughout the pandemic, but with the second wave of COVID-19 growing by the day, they need to know that the government will take action now.

The Ontario Hospital Association is calling for the government to increase public health restrictions to stop the spread of COVID-19 and to keep hospital capacity at safe levels. Will the Premier listen to the best medical advice from our hospitals and do what is needed to keep Ontarians safe?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much, Speaker, and I thank the member very much for the question. In fact, I am in regular communication with the Ontario Hospital Association, as well as with the Ontario Medical Association, the nurses' association and many other groups out there, as well as our public health officials.

We understand that this is a difficult time for hospitals right now. Their capacity is increasing. We've got increased numbers of COVID-19. We've got flu season approaching. We're trying to carry on with the surgeries and procedures that were postponed during wave 1.

That is why we came forward with our comprehensive plan, Keeping Ontarians Safe. It's a \$2.8-billion plan that's going to make sure that we can carry on dealing with COVID, dealing with flu season, dealing with those surgeries, being ready to respond to surges and having the health human resources necessary, because it's one thing to increase capacity in hospitals in terms of space, but you also need the people there to be able to run with that.

We are in regular contact with the hospital association. I speak with them almost every single day. I spoke with them this morning—

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

Ms. Sara Singh: Hospitals in Ontario are already struggling to keep capacity down, and the second wave is still growing. In the community of Brampton, Brampton Civic Hospital had an occupancy rate of 93% in September and was in code gridlock eight times in just 12 days.

Code gridlock means that there are more patients waiting in the ER than there are actual beds available. This is completely unacceptable and puts patients and our front-

line workers at risk. What is the government prepared to commit to today to ensure that Brampton Civic stays out of gridlock in the second wave?

Hon. Christine Elliott: We are very aware of the capacity challenges that many hospitals in Ontario are experiencing, I would say especially in some of the areas in Peel region, in Ottawa and in Toronto. In Toronto, they have the same issues with respect to capacity.

We have a plan. We have the plan that we've set out, Keeping Ontarians Safe, and we're prepared to put the money into dealing with that, as well: \$2.8 billion, which will help hospitals, which will deal with capacity challenges. We're working on that now, and I hope to have more to say on that within the next several days.

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SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: My question is to the Premier. Premier, our government continues to champion all small business owners in this province. I am proud of signature initiatives to support small business that our government has brought in. This includes cutting the small business income tax rate, which delivered up to \$1,500 in annual savings to more than 275,000 businesses, as well as cutting red tape and excessive regulation. Also, during this time, our government has continued to provide much-needed supports to business by way of tax deferrals, WSIB premiums relief and commercial rent assistance.

Speaker, can the Premier please share with the Legislature how we will continue to help small business, especially locally owned restaurants, continue to operate safely as we move into the winter months?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank the great member from Oakville North–Burlington for the great question. Every decision that we've made down here is based on health and science. We have some of the great medical leaders around Canada right here on our health table. We have a great Minister of Health and Minister of Long-Term Care, who have been working around the clock, so we appreciate their work.

The people say, "What keeps you up at night?" Because I've walked a mile in their shoes. Coming from a family-run business and trying to meet payroll and trying to get customers in, it's difficult. It can destroy lives. It can destroy tens of thousands of lives if we don't see the evidence.

Our team, the health table and the command table, we just haven't seen the evidence for Toronto right now. We're going to do everything we can to work collaboratively with the chief medical officer of Toronto, along with our chief medical officer, along with the mayor, who I talk to almost every single day. We need to keep their livelihoods moving forward and give them hope—

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

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: My supplemental question is back to the Premier. Premier, I know that everyone in the Legislature echoes your strong support for

our small business owners and working women and men in the province.

Our government continues to take targeted and strategic measures to address COVID outbreaks in hot spot regions. This includes additional guidelines to make sure that when you're going into a restaurant, there are six to a table and that we get contact information for every single person. We've reduced the hours of serving alcohol; we've shut down strip joints; we've closed bars earlier. Can the Premier please share with the Legislature what additional due diligence our government will undertake as we address hot spot regions while supporting small business?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank the member. The health and safety of Ontarians is our top priority. We're looking for the bad actors, and I'll be very frank, I think there are very few. I've been to a lot of restaurants, like we've all been to restaurants—these folks are following the guidelines, Mr. Speaker. As I said earlier on, we're looking for the people that are reckless and careless, and there are very few of them. We can't paint a broad brush right across the whole industry.

I can't begin to tell you—and I don't know how they get my number—I had endless calls yesterday from restaurant owners, little small businesses, mom-and-pop shops, saying, “Thank you. Finally, someone's standing up for us, someone's voicing our opinion. We're following the guidelines. We're putting all the procedures and guidelines in place, no matter if it's dividing the tables, six to a table, getting contact information.” These people are working their backs off, and we're here to help them and save them and give them hope.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Premier. The Premier's failure on testing has left thousands not only waiting for a test, but now even waiting for an appointment to get a test—an appointment that they're even struggling to get this week. The backlog is terrible. And while some people wait for those appointments, the little people that the Premier claims to protect, other people jump to the head of the queue because they pay for a test. All it takes to jump is to pay for the test. Why is this government allowing private testing for COVID-19 at the same time other people wait in line even for an appointment?

Hon. Doug Ford: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, we tested 42,000 people. People are happy that now they have certainty. They get an appointment and they go in there. We're adding close to another 80 pharmacies, along with our 151 assessment centres, along with our pop-up testing areas that go around the province.

Finally, people have certainty. They know they're going to go online. They know they're going to get a test. They know they're going to get the results. I just don't know where they're getting their figures from, because we're hammering out the testing.

And by the way, the backlog: Thanks to the people of Ontario—we had a 90,000 backlog. Now we're down to 58,000 because the people are helping out. I asked for help

and they've been helping out over the last few days. We have dropped it down. We'll be down to 10,000 or 20,000 in the backlog in the next two days. I want to thank the people of Ontario for just following and—

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

Mr. John Vanthof: The Ford government refuses to disallow people from jumping the queue. Maybe they don't realize, but what people realize is every private sector test—every time somebody jumps the queue—that's one less swab for the public sector, one less swab for the little people. Every time reagent is used by the private sector for the \$400 test, there's one less dose for the people waiting in the public line. And every time a technician does the work on that test, you know what? That's one less technician able to help the people standing in line.

Why does this government refuse to support public health care, actually make everyone have to go through the public system, and not have anyone jump the queue—actually protect the little people instead of talking about it?

Hon. Doug Ford: Mr. Speaker, I've heard about this; I don't know anyone who is doing it. I just don't. I don't know anyone who's doing it.

I know one thing: We have maxed out every diagnostic lab technician there is in the private sector and in the public sector, making sure that we reach out to the call, just in universities, and there is only so much reagent in the entire world.

By the way, I have to give a shout-out to Premier King of PEI. They're sending testing kits over to help us out—and Nova Scotia. I got a call from the Premier of Newfoundland. Everyone's pitching in. We're all in this together. We're proud Canadians, and we're going to help our neighbours any time we see difficulties. That's why Ontario will always be there for the other provinces when they need help, Mr. Speaker.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

RÉPONSE À LA COVID-19

M^{me} Lucille Collard: My question is for the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. Since the beginning of the pandemic, I've heard from people in my riding who depend on the Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works just to make a living and to get by. People in these programs are often forgotten members of our communities, and many of them are extremely vulnerable to COVID-19.

Access to testing is becoming more difficult because of insufficient capacity. For these people with disabilities, the testing has been inaccessible from the beginning. For them, it means long trips by bus, expensive taxi rides or having to rely on volunteers for transportation. That's what happens in my riding, where testing centres are very few and far between. Further, many of these people with disabilities are immunocompromised or have mobility issues. Making a trip to a testing centre becomes a real challenge.

My question is, do the minister and the government have a plan to support municipalities to make testing more accessible for those in our communities who are struggling the most?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thank you very much to the member opposite for the question this morning. It's an important one, and our government acted quickly and often to support members of Ontario's public with disabilities, including the ODSP and Ontario Works. Working alongside my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, we were out of the gates quickly on March 22 with the Ontario Social Services Relief Fund.

When it comes to testing, there have been many, many investments made in testing, both in Ottawa, where the member is from, and across the province. The Minister of Health talks all the time of new assessment centres popping up in communities to make them more accessible to members with disabilities and the general public.

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We've been working extremely hard at making sure that, when necessary, community paramedics are also there to go to homes where maybe it's not accessible for the individual to get out and get to the assessment centre. Those community paramedics have been real champions during COVID-19 in getting out there and supporting individuals right across the—

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Ma question supplémentaire va être en français.

Encore au ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires : plus tôt durant cette pandémie, le gouvernement a offert une aide financière très modeste aux gens qui dépendent du Programme ontarien de soutien aux personnes handicapées. Ce montant-là était déjà insuffisant, a été mal communiqué et a été terminé prématurément, car, faut-il le rappeler, nous sommes toujours en pleine pandémie.

Pourtant, même avec ce montant additionnel, les bénéficiaires du programme recevaient moins que le montant de 2 000 \$ du fédéral jugé nécessaire pour se loger et se nourrir. La pandémie a imposé un fardeau financier qui menace de pauvreté ces gens qui reçoivent déjà trop peu. Ils ont besoin d'une aide véritable du gouvernement, car ils dépendent de nos services sociaux, sans que ce ne soit de leur faute.

Le ministre va-t-il s'engager à faire plus pour soutenir financièrement ces gens de nos communautés qui font maintenant face à la pauvreté?

Hon. Todd Smith: Merci pour la question. We acted very quickly out of the gates, as I mentioned, to provide the Social Services Relief Fund to communities right across the province, along with my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. That first tranche in the SSRF was \$200 million; there have been subsequent investments of \$150 million on two different occasions.

On top of that, we also brought in support for those on ODSP in the form of emergency assistance and in the form of emergency benefits. Those emergency benefits were

available—\$100 a month per individual, \$200 per family—throughout the pandemic. Over 250,000 Ontarians signed up and received funding from the Ontario government during the pandemic, and we continue to make discretionary benefits available to individuals.

Even though we are in stage 3 now of our reopening plan in the province, there is funding available for those on ODSP to make the case for the support they need. Your Ontario government will be there for you during these times.

CIVILIAN OVERSIGHT OF POLICE

Mr. Aris Babikian: Many Ontarians want to know that policing as well as police oversight are modern, efficient and of the highest possible quality. This is critically important to ensure that police services maintain the trust of the communities they serve.

I understand that last Friday, the government announced Devon Clunis as the first Inspector General of Policing in Ontario. As a former chief of police in Winnipeg with a proven track record of transformative policing, I am sure that Mr. Clunis will bring an important perspective to this important new aspect of Ontario's robust policing oversight system.

Mr. Speaker, would the government explain how the new role of the Inspector General of Policing will contribute to a robust oversight system?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General to reply.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I want to thank the member for Scarborough—Agincourt for the question. Yes, you are correct: I am pleased to share that Mr. Clunis will be joining the ministry as Ontario's first Inspector General of Policing. This new role will enhance police service delivery and increase public trust.

The role of inspector general, which is a new position created under the Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act passed by this House last year, will perform a critical role monitoring and conducting inspections in a number of areas, including ensuring compliance with the new Community Safety and Policing Act when it is brought into force; preventing police misconduct and imposing measures where necessary; and investigating police complaints related to the provision of adequate and effective policing services.

We look forward to leveraging Mr. Clunis's experiences as it comes to continued regulatory development required to bring the Community Safety and Policing Act into force.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Aris Babikian: The parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General mentioned that the inspector general will have inspection powers under the Community Safety and Policing Act. As I am sure members will remember, this House passed the Comprehensive Ontario Police Services Act in 2019, which includes the Community Safety and Policing Act and other key elements to modernize police and policing oversight. Considering that context, Mr.

Speaker, how does the role of the inspector general fit into the broader framework that will be established through the Community Safety and Policing Act?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you again to the member for Scarborough–Agincourt for that question.

The nature of policing and community safety has changed since the Police Services Act was first introduced in 1990. The issues faced by our police services and their members today are much more complex. This is why the Community Safety and Policing Act is such an important piece of legislation that will help transform policing throughout the province of Ontario.

The creation of Ontario's first Inspector General of Policing is a key deliverable as we work to bring the Community Safety and Policing Act into force. The act will establish a sustainable framework that provides tools necessary for police to do their jobs effectively; flexibility to ensure that community safety efforts can be tailored to local needs; and the standards, transparency and accountability expected by all Ontarians.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Premier. Janice Duffy, a constituent of mine, recently spoke to me about her dad, Doug. He lives in The Village of Glendale Crossing, which is a long-term-care home in London. She said that after her dad fell a couple of weeks ago, he's been having adverse reactions to new medications he's received. Now he requires 24-hour care, 1 to 1.

The home informed Janice and her family that they are to provide that care for him by either attending to him themselves or by paying a private caregiver at a cost of \$14,000 a month. That is in addition to what they are already paying for their dad's stay in the home. The home says that this is because they are short-staffed.

Janice is working full-time. She now has to find ways to work in between caring full-time for her father.

Families and their loved ones should not have to shoulder the burden of the government's lack of action after decades of the long-standing short-staffing crisis. Will the government commit to a permanent wage increase, ensuring full-time hours and benefits in order to recruit and retain PSWs in long-term care?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Long-Term Care to reply.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for the question, to the member opposite. Looking at our personal support workers in long-term care, this whole sector has been neglected, as the member opposite points out, for decades. It is our government that has taken on the commitment to repair, rebuild and modernize long-term care.

This includes addressing the needs of our staff. We began with the pandemic pay. We recently announced \$540 million—over half a billion dollars—towards efforts in long-term care to provide more support for staffing, to provide more ways to allow minor capital investments to occur, to provide the training programs for PSWs, to recruit those personal support workers and staff to long-

term care, and to provide and create a culture and an environment where people want to stay and want to work.

This is ongoing. We will persist and we will get the job done.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Back to the Premier: The Village of Glendale Crossing is owned and operated by a for-profit company. Even with a raging pandemic that has devastated the long-term-care system, shareholders in for-profit long-term-care homes have not seen a loss in dividends. Families like Janice's, on the other hand, are left to spend more out of pocket for a long-term-care system that they already paid for through their taxes.

Why are families forced to pay for additional staffing out of their own pockets while companies continue to profit off the public dollar? Will this government commit to taking profits out of care?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thanks again to the member for the question. I want to make sure everyone understands that long-term care is focused on the resident, making sure that we improve resident care, that we ensure that we have an environment where staff can be supported to provide that care, where support for families is there.

This is an ongoing effort, and we understand that there is some confusion about the for-profit or the ownership aspect of it. We recognize that, really, it is the areas where there is high levels of COVID that have caused the issues for many of the homes, including for-profit homes. But for-profit homes are restricted by the envelopes of funding that they have. There is really no room to take profit from that. They must give back to government, to our ministry, funds that are not used in the vast majority of the envelopes.

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COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, seeing that the front benches have emptied, I will pose my question to the Minister of Long-Term Care.

Over 1,300 public health scientists and 1,500 medical practitioners have—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member knows full well that he's not to make reference to the absence of other members.

Place your question, please.

Mr. Randy Hillier: The document is called the Great Barrington Declaration. It was drafted by professors from Harvard, Stanford and Oxford, and they are the most respected epidemiologists in the world. Their concerns are singular in focus: The prevailing COVID policies are having damaging physical and mental impacts on the public. They are aghast at the public health advice being provided to Western governments. It is contrary to the science and what we now know about COVID.

Minister, Nobel laureates and reputable world-leading experts on infectious diseases are telling governments that what they're doing is causing more harm than good. Will

you heed their advice and endorse the Great Barrington Declaration, as I have?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thanks to the member opposite for the question. As a physician for many, many years and studying science and evidence, it's very clear that there are always differences of opinion. Those differences of opinion have to be carefully considered and thought out.

Our government and my Ministry of Long-Term Care have been working with the science and the evidence of experts—many experts, hundreds of experts, the Chief Medical Officer of Health being one of them. There are many, many areas of evidence that must be weighed and understood, not only at a macro level but a micro level. There are many considerations being given. All of this evidence is emerging. At the beginning of COVID, there was very little information available. Now there is more than most people could ever manage to get through.

With the essential caregiver piece, I want to make sure that I repeat this: Our essential caregivers are back into the homes. They are there providing support. The mental well-being of our long-term—

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: I do thank the minister for her response. However, these pre-eminent experts have stated government policies are resulting in “lower childhood vaccination rates, worsening cardiovascular disease outcomes, fewer cancer screenings” and the erosion of mental health. They state that the “current lockdown policies are ... devastating” our “short- and long-term public health.”

They are asking all governments to shift gears and move towards a focused protection model that protects those at risk, while letting those who are healthy return to a normal life.

Minister, will you do the right thing and follow the advice being given by the most pre-eminent world leaders in this field? Or should the people of Ontario prepare themselves for further lockdowns, more bankruptcies, further medical delays? And now we see forced isolation in detention camps on the horizon—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The Minister of Long-Term Care?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: I reject much of the premise of that question.

Again, I want to reinforce the concept of hope. We understand what we've been through. We understand the dark days that we've had during COVID-19, the lack of information. Working as hard as everyone could to collaborate, consult and create a plan forward: That's what we were doing as a government. Talking to our experts as the science emerged—that's what we need to go forward.

We need a level of support for our long-term-care homes, for everyone who is waiting for health care. I have tremendous hope. Our government is working with that hope to understand how to make things better coming out of COVID-19—and we will come out of COVID-19. We will come out having lessons learned. We will come out better.

Ontarians are all in this together. They are doing their part. We all need to do our part, and we need to stay focused as we move through this in a positive way.

MULTICULTURALISM

Mr. Jim McDonell: My question is to the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries. I'm extremely proud to call Canada home because it has built a strong cultural mosaic. Ontario is no different. All of us have helped build a rich history of different cultures and heritages that help define this province.

Minister, last week I was proud to speak to my bill, Bill 208, An Act to proclaim Scottish Heritage Day. The bill aims to recognize the important contributions that Scottish settlers have made to the development of not only this great province, but the world.

Minister, can you please tell us why Scottish Heritage Day is so important to you and to the province of Ontario as a whole?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much, Speaker, and to the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell—no, you're from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. He and I have spent many, many times at the Glengarry Highland Games over the years and I know both of us were disappointed this year that we couldn't continue that annual tradition.

As the minister who has responsibilities both for tourism and for culture, I think this is a great idea for members, particularly private members, to bring forward bills to talk about the national importance of their respective communities. I know myself and the member opposite from Ottawa South had the opportunity in the previous Parliament to bring forward something called Lebanese Heritage Month, so it's really important that we get to do that and talk about the wonderful commitment that new Canadians, and old Canadians, have brought to this community.

I'd like to just point out with respect to him, some of the greatest cultural contributions in this country have come from Scottish Canadians, like Farley Mowat, and also James Naismith, the founder of basketball. He's originally a Scottish Canadian. And of course, in this ministry, we have Fort William, which talks about the rich cultural heritage that the Indigenous population as well as the Scottish Canadians have taken over the years to Fort William in Thunder Bay. I look forward to—

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you to the minister for your appreciation of all the different cultures that make this province so great. In fact, Minister, recently two other heritage bills passed third reading: Bill 180, An Act to proclaim Somali Heritage Week, and Bill 131, the Tibetan Heritage Month Act. These are well-deserved bills that are significant in sharing and honouring the proud heritage of Somali and Tibetan Canadians.

Minister, as you know, Ontario offers the world's cultural diversity in one province, and that doesn't just

mean attractions. The diversity of cultures is in fact what makes this province so great.

Minister, Somali and Tibetan Canadians have truly offered so much to Ontario. They have made a significant cultural impact that adds to the identity of our province, and we see it all around us every day. Minister, my question for you is: What sort of impact have the Somali and Tibetan Canadians had in our province?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: I've often boasted that Ontario is the world in one province, and as the tourism minister, it's really important that we continue to showcase our cultural diversity, particularly as we come out of COVID-19, hopefully, in the next couple of years with respect to tourism.

I would like to first point out how proud we are to support Bhutla Karpoche. She is the first Tibetan elected in North America and she brought forward a very important piece of legislation showcasing the compassion and the grace of the Tibetan people. I know that we're very proud of her and the work of her predecessor, Cheri DiNovo.

I'd also like to say a thank you to Faisal Hassan for bringing an Act to proclaim Somali Heritage Week. He is the first Somali MPP in this Legislature, and I think that's also something that we should continue to support.

The best part of this Legislature is when we work together and we recognize the strength of our diversity at the same as being unified, so I want to say thanks to the members who bring forward these important pieces of legislation to remind us of who we are and where we're going.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: My question is to the Premier. Delays in testing are creating chaos for families across the province. Yesterday, I heard from a mother in my riding, Diane, whose daughter was sent home from daycare with a low-grade fever. In order to get the necessary test for her daughter, she had to try three different testing centres, travel from Parkdale–High Park all the way to Richmond Hill and wait over eight hours with a sick child.

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The government had months to prepare for the increased demand in testing and lab capacity. Why did they fail to do so?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader to reply.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think both the Premier and the Minister of Health outlined earlier the tremendous progress that we're making with respect to testing capacity in the province of Ontario. I know it's probably of little comfort to the member's constituent that she had to wait, as the member said, for eight hours, but she should know that of course we're doing everything that we possibly can to ensure that those waits are a thing of the past.

I know the President of the Treasury Board and the Minister of Finance have authorized large sums to support our health care system, and that includes testing. I'm sure

the province of Ontario will continue to lead the country and get better for its people as the second wave takes over.

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: The nightmare of getting a test for her daughter was only half of it. Six days later, and Diane still has no result. The time away from work and child care fees have cost this family over \$2,000. Her husband is at risk of losing his job if he misses any more work.

How long will families like Diane's be forced to pay for this government's inadequate second wave plan?

Hon. Paul Calandra: At the outset, let me just assure the member's constituent's husband, if I can, that one of the first bills that this Legislature did pass was protection for individuals who found themselves in crisis because of COVID, so that job would be protected. There is no way that somebody could be fired as a result of COVID issues.

Again, it's one of the reasons why we put so much money into testing over the last number of months as we prepared for the second wave. We knew that it would be very important to support the hard work that the Minister of Education has done to ensure that our kids can go back to school, but equally important that our daycare centres remain open, because as the Premier just said earlier today, it is vitally important that we keep this economy going for all of the small, medium and large job creators who are relying on us. It is through their efforts that we are able to fund supports for testing, that we're able to put record amounts of money into long-term care and into health care. It is in our interest to get it done, and we'll continue to get the job done for the people of Ontario.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. John Fraser: Since at least last April, the government's own experts have been telling them that with two million kids returning to school and opening up our economy, we needed to be somewhere between 75,000 and 100,000 tests—since last April—and they said it's going to take at least three months to get it all ramped up.

Now we're doing 40,000 tests a day, and last Friday the backlog was 92,000. Today it was 58,000. The Premier is proud of that, but we did have to shut down testing for about a day and a half. BC has no backlog. They're testing a bit less of their population than we are, but they have no backlog.

My question is really simple. To the Premier: We had the time, the money and the advice. How are we going to get to where we need to be in testing and when are we going to get there?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think the Premier and the Minister of Health have been very, very clear on that. We have started through the first wave. We learned a great deal through the first wave. We put in place a fall preparedness plan that I think will help us get to where we need to be on testing.

The Premier has been abundantly clear that we needed to get to 50,000 tests a day to ensure that the economy could keep going, to ensure that we could support the hard work that the Minister of Education has put into ensuring that our kids can go back to school so that we can support our teachers, our front-line workers. The Minister of Long-Term Care and the minister of seniors have both told us how important it is to get testing in place, Mr. Speaker.

Are we there yet? No, we're not there yet, but we are proceeding as quickly as we can to be there, and I congratulate the people on the front lines, who have been processing record amounts of testing. We are leading the country, Mr. Speaker. I am proud of that. We should all be proud of that. Is there more work to do? Absolutely, and that's why the funding is in place to get us to the goal of continuing to lead the country.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Yesterday, I said the Premier took his eye off the ball. I was wrong: He dropped the ball, because if he had listened to what his own experts were telling him about the testing that we needed to do, or if he had listened to experts about what we needed to do in schools, we wouldn't find ourselves in a position where Toronto Public Health, the OHA, the RNAO and countless other people are saying, "You've got to shut things down." We wouldn't have been there.

Those things that are being advised to you and telling you where you need to be—that's so we can keep the economy going. Saying that you're protecting the little guy doesn't mean anything when you don't take the advice that protects the little guy.

So I'm going to ask the question again, for the fourth time: When are we going to get to where we need to be in testing here in Ontario? Simple answer: When?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll say that the member is absolutely, completely, positively wrong. This government and all of the members of this Legislature, on both sides of this House, have been working non-stop since the first wave hit. Since this House came down on March 13, we have been working non-stop, collaboratively, to prepare not only for the second wave but to make sure that our small, medium and large enterprises could continue creating jobs and the economy could keep going.

The Minister of Education has been working non-stop with all members, on both sides of this House, to make sure our kids could go back to school. The Minister of Health has been working non-stop to make sure we had the testing capacity to meet the needs of the Minister of Education, to meet the needs of the Minister of Long-Term Care, to meet the needs of the minister responsible for seniors, to make sure that the people the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services protects all have the resources they need in place.

We are leading the country. As opposed to talking down about everything that the people of the province of Ontario have accomplished, let's celebrate the fact that our front-line workers have done an incredible job, and that we will continue to lead the country.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question this morning is to the Premier. Recently, a few small businesses in my riding have made the responsible decision to temporarily close after an employee tested positive for COVID-19. These businesses are doing the right thing. They're doing everything that they can to keep their employees, their customers and their community all safe. But given the long waits to get tests and receive results, there's no clear timeline for when these businesses will be able to reopen.

So my question: Can the Premier tell small businesses in my riding and across Ontario how long is too long to wait for COVID-19 test results?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons why we've put so many resources into increasing the testing capacity, one of the reasons why the Premier did not stop after March in asking the federal government to help us with the rapid testing—we have been on top of this rapid testing for months. We've put record amounts of money into health care. The reason that we are doing that is not only to keep our students safe, but it's to keep our economy going.

We cannot pay for increased spending on health care, increased spending on long-term care if the economy does not continue to grow. And it is precisely for those small business people that we've put all of this money and resources into testing. We've said that we want to get to 50,000; we will get to 50,000. We have turned all of the resources of government to get us to that goal, precisely for the people that you're talking about, for the kids in our school system, and those—

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: To the Premier: So this morning, Tuesday morning, when I checked the online booking site, the earliest available appointment at the West End, the East End, St. Joe's Mountain and Dave Andreychuk Mountain Arena was Friday. That's three days from now. And that's just the test. It's not clear to anyone when they can expect the results to come back.

Small businesses are working hard. They're following all the protocols. They're even doing their own contact tracing. But the government is refusing to provide financial supports, and now they've failed to provide the timely COVID-19 testing that businesses need to stay open.

Does the Premier not understand that businesses need reliable, efficient and timely testing programs to keep their doors open?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Ironically enough, just as I was answering that question, I received a text from a constituent of mine, which I would be happy to share with the member opposite: "I called Markham Stouffville Hospital and got an appointment window within two hours this morning for testing. The customer service was stellar on the phone—no issues at all. Thank you for all that your government is doing."

Which is fine, but we have to get that level of service across the entire province, Mr. Speaker. That is why we are putting so much funding into ensuring that we get testing to a level that remains the highest in all of Canada. But we understood. That's why the Premier has been so hard on making sure that we get these rapid tests in place. We asked the federal government—it's great that they have made some purchases of rapid tests, but it's time to get these tests approved so that we can start rolling this out, so that we can make sure that the small and medium job creators in this province have all of the resources they need to continue growing the economy.

1130

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Good morning. My question is for the Premier.

The Premier has provided a lot of praise for the great friendship he has developed with the Liberal Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, and Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland. Last month, the Premier said that the Prime Minister did an incredible job as Prime Minister, and he called the deputy "amazing." Four days ago, his friends announced that extended family members and international students would be allowed to re-enter Canada, even while all non-essential travel remains closed.

My question is: Does the Premier support his friend Prime Minister Trudeau in the decision to allow extended family and international students to travel into Canada during this time, while all non-essential travel remains closed?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Ross Romano: Thanks for the opportunity to respond to the question. We take international student travel into this province extremely seriously. We have put in a number of conditions, and we have been working very closely with our institutions to ensure the safety of our students, our faculty and all members of staff on all of our campuses across all of this province.

We have been working so closely with our institutions. I've been in consultations with our sector over the last several months. We worked on a pilot program, as you will remember, in early June, which allowed us to reintroduce our students in a very safe way into our campuses. It was an exceptional program that allowed us to work towards building a better program as we moved forward in the remainder of the school year.

We continue to work very closely with our institutions, continue to have daily conversations, and our institutions are right there at the forefront, ready to support our province in every possible way they can.

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: It's great to see the Premier get along with others, even if it means it can only be done with politicians who don't serve in his own caucus.

The position being taken by the Prime Minister seems to conflict or be at odds with the position of the Premier taken on the exact same day. On the same day that travel restrictions were eased by Prime Minister Trudeau, the Premier announced new social gathering restrictions for the people of Ontario. The Premier ordered that Ontarians be restricted to only spending time with people living in their own household, even for Thanksgiving.

Can the Premier explain whether this government believes the federal government's easing of international travel restrictions conflicts with and even undermines this government's own decision to order that Ontarians cannot visit any family, immediate or extended, who do not live within their own home?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, we have been very deliberate on this. The people of the province of Ontario—in fact, people across this country—have said very clearly to us, "Put down your partisan swords." There is lots of time for us to have disagreements on the things that we feel passionately about, but we are faced with a global health and economic crisis.

Are we going to continue to work with the federal government, even though they are Liberal? Absolutely. Are we going to continue to work with British Columbia, even though they have an NDP government? Absolutely. We are going to do whatever we can, including working—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Order.

Hon. Paul Calandra:—including working with members on both sides of this House.

We passed a number of pieces of legislation with the unanimous support of all the members of this House. We're going to continue to do that because it's in the best interests of the people of the province of Ontario; it's in the best interests of the people of Canada. When we defeat COVID, we defeat it together, and that's what grows a bigger, better, stronger Canada.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: To the Premier: I have a resident in St. Catharines who is trying to get a COVID-19 test in order to see her dying grandmother in a nursing home. Calling the only St. Catharines pharmacy that provides COVID-19 tests, she cannot get a test until October 23, so under distress, she called the Niagara assessment centre last Friday and the voicemail said that they would return her message in 48 hours.

Yesterday, she called again. However, somehow, quietly over the weekend, the time it takes to get a return call had doubled—yes, doubled. The Niagara assessment centre is now returning phone calls in three to four days. Three to four days—that's just to get a return call. This certainly does not guarantee a fast appointment, and this is so unacceptable for Niagara residents who have to wait three to four days for a test.

Mr. Premier, tell me how this government can continue to say their plan is working when someone in Niagara has to wait up to four days just to get a call back for such an important test.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Government House leader to reply.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Listen, as we said right from the beginning, we are very proud of what we've put in place so far. It has been a North American-leading effort with respect to COVID-19. Is there work to be done? Absolutely there's more work to be done. That's why it's so important that this House continue to function. That's why it is so important that we work together in order to address some of the issues across the province.

But, make no mistake about it, we have put in a significant amount of resources to increase testing capacity across this province. We will continue to do that, and I congratulate all of those front-line workers who have been working non-stop, day and night to ensure that the people of this province remain safe.

To the people of Niagara, I tell them very, very clearly: Your government understands what you're going through, we hear you, and that is why we're going to move mountains to make sure all Ontarians remain safe.

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

This House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1136 to 1500.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received a report on intended appointments, dated October 6, 2020, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 111(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

DWARFISM AWARENESS AND ACCEPTANCE MONTH ACT, 2020 LOI DE 2020 SUR LE MOIS DE SENSIBILISATION AU NANISME ET DE SON ACCEPTATION

Madame Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 211, An Act to proclaim the month of October Dwarfism Awareness and Acceptance Month / Projet de

loi 211, Loi proclamant le mois d'octobre Mois de sensibilisation au nanisme et de son acceptation.

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 Nickel Belt care to explain her bill?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Absolutely. Thank you, Speaker. The month of October is Dwarfism Awareness and Acceptance Month in many jurisdictions around the world. Dwarfism Awareness and Acceptance Month is intended to increase public knowledge, create positive awareness and change negative misconceptions of people born with dwarfism.

By proclaiming October as Dwarfism Awareness and Acceptance Month, the province of Ontario contributes to raising awareness among the general public of dwarfism and promoting a positive image and a more supportive social, emotional and educational environment for people of short stature and their families.

I'd like to thank the Little People of Ontario association for bringing this to my attention.

CONNECTING CARE AMENDMENT ACT (PATIENT BILL OF RIGHTS), 2020

LOI DE 2020 MODIFIANT LA LOI POUR DES SOINS INTERCONNECTÉS (DÉCLARATION DES DROITS DES PATIENTS)

Mr. Fraser moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 212, An Act to amend the Connecting Care Act, 2019 with respect to a patient bill of rights / Projet de loi 212, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2019 pour des soins interconnectés en ce qui concerne la Déclaration des droits des patients.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South can explain his bill.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to thank my colleagues for their support.

The goal of this bill is to clearly state, protect and enshrine in legislation the rights of patients who are receiving care across the entire health care system. This includes a right to transparency, access to information, freedom from stigma and harassment, and a patient's right to appeal if they believe their rights have been infringed upon. This bill also introduces a definition of an "essential caregiver" and sets out every patient's right to designate an essential caregiver in any setting.

BETTER FOR PEOPLE,
SMARTER FOR BUSINESS ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020
POUR MIEUX SERVIR LA POPULATION
ET FACILITER LES AFFAIRES

Mr. Sarkaria moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 213, An Act to reduce burdens on people and businesses by enacting, amending and repealing various Acts and revoking a regulation / *Projet de loi 213, Loi visant à alléger le fardeau administratif qui pèse sur la population et les entreprises en édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois et en abrogeant un règlement.*

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): I'll invite the associate minister to briefly explain his bill.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: This legislation, if passed, will make government work better for people and smarter for business throughout the pandemic and beyond. We have a made-in-Ontario plan for recovery, renewal and long-term economic growth, and it starts with cutting costly red tape, reducing unnecessary burdens and digitizing government processes. This will help more people in business recover from the economic impacts of the pandemic while preparing them for the opportunities of the future.

The new act would help deliver clear, current and effective rules that would maintain and enhance public health, safety and the environment. It would streamline regulations to make them easier to understand and comply with. This would free up time and money for people and businesses to invest in what is so important right now: recovering, rebuilding and re-emerging from this pandemic stronger than ever before.

TIME AMENDMENT ACT, 2020
LOI DE 2020 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR L'HEURE LÉGALE

Mr. Roberts moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 214, An Act to amend the Time Act and various other Acts / *Projet de loi 214, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'heure légale et diverses autres lois.*

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 Ottawa West–Nepean care to explain his bill?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: This bill would end the outdated practice of the biannual time change in the province of Ontario and replace it with permanent daylight saving time here in Ontario, and crucially, it would do so, if passed by this Legislature, on a date proclaimed by the Lieutenant Governor.

PETITIONS

PUBLIC SECTOR COMPENSATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Kathryn Nault from Onaping in my riding for these petitions. They read as follows:

“Pandemic Pay....”

“Whereas the pandemic pay eligibility needs to be expanded as well as made retroactive to the beginning of the state of emergency; and

“Whereas Premier Ford stated repeatedly that the workers on the front lines have his full support but this is hard to believe given that so many do not qualify; and

“Whereas the list of eligible workers and workplaces should be expanded; and

“Whereas all front-line” health care “workers should be properly compensated;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To call on the Ford government to expand the \$4-per-hour pandemic pay to include all front-line workers that have put the needs of their community first and make the pay retroactive to the day the state of emergency was declared, so that their sacrifice and hard work to keep us safe is recognized.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk.

1510

EDUCATION FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Mrs. Bérubé from Hanmer in my riding for these petitions. It reads as follows: “Stop Ford’s Education Cuts.

“Whereas Doug Ford’s new education scheme seeks to dramatically increase class sizes starting in grade 4;

“Whereas the changes will mean thousands fewer teachers and education workers and less help for every student;

“Whereas secondary students will now be forced to take at least” two “classes online, with as many as 35 students in each course;

“Whereas Ford’s changes will” take away “\$1 billion out of Ontario’s education system by the end of the government’s term; and

“Whereas kids in Ontario deserve more opportunities, not fewer;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“Demand that the government halt the cuts to classrooms and invest to strengthen public education in Ontario.”

I support this petition. I will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Louella Hess from Hanmer in my riding for these petitions.

“MS Specialized Clinic in Sudbury....

“Whereas northeastern Ontario has one of the highest rates of multiple sclerosis (MS) in Ontario; and

“Whereas specialized MS clinics provide essential health care services to those living with multiple sclerosis, their caregiver and their family; and

“Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is recognized as a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario;

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

“Immediately set up a specialized MS clinic in the Sudbury area that is staffed by a neurologist who specializes in the treatment of multiple sclerosis, a physiotherapist and a social worker at a minimum.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Ms. Suze Morrison: I have a petition that reads: “Don’t Take Away Social and Economic Rights for Women and Marginalized People.

“Whereas Bill 47 erased many of the legislative gains achieved through Bill 148, the fairer labour laws and working conditions that had a particularly positive impact on women and marginalized people;

“Whereas statistics show that women, particularly women of colour, are most likely to be employed in precarious work, and the Bill 47 ... precarious employment while also eliminating protections for millions of Ontario workers;

“Whereas Bill 66 further erodes women’s and marginalized people’s social and economic rights; and

“Whereas the” Conservative “government continues to remove, cancel or freeze funding for other supports, programs and regulations that would increase women’s equality in the workforce and beyond;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to, at the very least:

“—reinstate paid sick days, the scheduled increase to a \$15 minimum wage, legislation to increase pay transparency, regulations that support equal pay for equal work, and all other worker protections gained under the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act;

“—reverse changes to daycare regulations that allow more children per caregiver;

“—reverse the retroactive cuts to ... the Ontario College of Midwives;

“—reinstate funding” for “sexual assault centres;

“—restore the round table on violence against women; and

“—restore the child and youth advocate commissioner’s office.”

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

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Mr. Jamie West: The petition is entitled “Don’t Take Away Social and Economic Rights for Women and Marginalized People.

“Whereas Bill 47 erased many of the legislative gains achieved through Bill 148, the fairer labour laws and working conditions that had a particularly positive impact on women and marginalized people;

“Whereas statistics show that women, particularly women of colour, are most likely to be employed in precarious work, and the Bill 47 amendments to the Employment Standards Act, 2000 and Labour Relations Act, 1995 create conditions that lead to a growth in precarious employment while also eliminating protections for millions of Ontario workers;

“Whereas Bill 66 further erodes women’s and marginalized people’s social and economic rights; and

“Whereas the Ford government continues to remove, cancel or freeze funding for other supports, programs and regulations that would increase women’s equality in the workforce and beyond;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to, at the very least:

“—reinstate paid sick days, the scheduled increase to a \$15 minimum wage, legislation to increase pay transparency, regulations that support equal pay for equal work, and all other worker protections gained under the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act;

“—reverse changes to daycare regulations that allow more children per caregiver;

“—reverse the retroactive cuts to funding for the Ontario College of Midwives;

“—reinstate funding increases to sexual assault centres;

“—restore the round table on violence against women; and

“—restore the child and youth advocate commissioner’s office.”

I support this petition, will affix my signature and will provide it to the usher.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: I have a petition entitled “Don’t Take Away Social and Economic Rights for Women and Marginalized People.

“Whereas Bill 47 erased many of the legislative gains achieved through Bill 148, the fairer labour laws and working conditions that had a particularly positive impact on women and marginalized people;

“Whereas statistics show that women, particularly women of colour, are most likely to be employed in precarious work, and the Bill 47 amendments to the Employment Standards Act, 2000 and Labour Relations Act, 1995 create conditions that lead to a growth in precarious employment while also eliminating protections for millions of Ontario workers;

“Whereas Bill 66 further erodes women’s and marginalized people’s social and economic rights; and

“Whereas the” Conservative “government continues to remove, cancel or freeze funding for other supports, programs and regulations that would increase women’s equality in the workforce and beyond;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to, at the very least:

“—reinstate paid sick days, the scheduled increase to a \$15 minimum wage, legislation to increase pay transparency, regulations that support equal pay for equal work, and all other worker protections gained under the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act;

“—reverse changes to daycare regulations that allow more children per caregiver;

“—reverse the retroactive cuts to funding for the Ontario College of Midwives;

“—reinstate funding increases to sexual assault centres;

“—restore the round table on violence against women; and

“—restore the child and youth advocate commissioner’s office.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature to it and send it to the Clerk.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: My petition is also entitled “Don’t Take Away Social and Economic Rights for Women and Marginalized People.

“Whereas Bill 47 erased many of the legislative gains achieved through Bill 148, the fairer labour laws and working conditions that had a particularly positive impact on women and marginalized people;

“Whereas statistics show that women, particularly women of colour, are most likely to be employed in precarious work, and the Bill 47 amendments to the Employment Standards Act, 2000 and Labour Relations Act, 1995 create conditions that lead to a growth in precarious employment while also eliminating protections for millions of Ontario workers;

“Whereas Bill 66 further erodes women’s and marginalized people’s social and economic rights; and

“Whereas the Ford government continues to remove, cancel or freeze funding for other supports, programs and regulations that would increase women’s equality in the workforce and beyond;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to, at the very least:

“—reinstate paid sick days, the scheduled increase to a \$15 minimum wage, legislation to increase pay transparency, regulations that support equal pay for equal work, and all other worker protections gained under the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act;

“—reverse changes to daycare regulations that allow more children per caregiver;

“—reverse the retroactive cuts to funding for the Ontario College of Midwives;

“—reinstate funding increases to sexual assault centres;

“—restore the round table on violence against women; and

“—restore the child and youth advocate commissioner’s office.”

I agree with this petition and will be affixing my signature and sending it down to the Clerk.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Douglas Gunn from Capreol in my riding for this petition called “Time to Care.

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

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

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

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To amend the LTC Homes Act ... for a legislated minimum care standard of four hours per resident per day, adjusted for acuity level and case mix.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk.

1520

ANTI-SMOKING INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have these petitions that come from Grey-Bruce, from the Associate Minister of Energy, the MPP from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

They read as follows:

“Whereas:

“—In the past 10 years in Ontario, 86% of all movies with on-screen smoking were rated for youth;

“—The tobacco industry has a long, well-documented history of promoting tobacco use on screen;

“—A scientific report released by the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit estimated that 185,000 children in Ontario today will be recruited to smoking by exposure to on-screen smoking;”

“—More than 59,000 will eventually die from tobacco-related cancers, strokes, heart disease and emphysema, incurring at least \$1.1 billion in health care costs; and whereas an adult rating (18A) for movies that promote on-screen tobacco in Ontario would save at least 30,000 lives and half a billion health care dollars;

“—The Ontario government has a stated goal to achieve the lowest smoking rates in Canada;

“—79% of Ontarians support not allowing smoking in movies rated G, PG, 14A ... ;

“—The Minister of Government and Consumer Services has the authority to amend the regulations of the Film Classification Act via cabinet;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“—To request the Standing Committee on Government Agencies examine the ways in which the regulations of the Film Classification Act could be amended to reduce smoking in youth-rated films released in Ontario;

“—That the committee report back on its findings to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and that the Minister of Government and Consumer Services prepare a response.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk.

AUTISM TREATMENT

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from Patricia Caine and Bernard Huneault from my riding. It reads as follows:

“Support for Autistic Children in Ontario....

“Whereas every autistic child in Ontario deserves access to evidence-based therapy so that they can meet their” full “potential;

“Whereas the capped funding system is based on age and not the clinical needs of the child;

“Whereas the program does not ensure access to services for rural and francophone children;

“Whereas the new Ontario Autism Program does not provide additional funding for travel costs;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows: “to direct the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to ensure access to an equitable, needs-based autism services for all children who need them.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SOLDIERS’ AID COMMISSION ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 SUR LA COMMISSION D’AIDE AUX ANCIENS COMBATTANTS

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 29, 2020, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 202, An Act to continue the Soldiers’ Aid Commission/ Projet de loi 202, Loi prorogeant la Commission d’aide aux anciens combattants.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: As always, it is a privilege to be able to stand in this House and to be able to speak to the issues that come before the Legislature.

Speaker, let me just begin by thanking you for all the work that you have put in throughout the last half-year, especially since the pandemic started. I know it’s been challenging at times, and I know there have been a lot of changes both in the way that we operate here in this Legislature and, of course, in our constituency offices. I want to thank the desk for their incredible work, the Clerk and all of his team, because I know without them, it would

be exceptionally difficult for all of us to be able to debate the pieces of legislation that come before this House.

Today, I do have the great privilege of speaking to a piece of legislation that I believe is exceptionally important. This act is Bill 202, An Act to continue the Soldiers’ Aid Commission. I’ll speak a little bit about the act and some of its more technical applications and some of the background about it, but I just want to begin by sharing an homage, perhaps, or a story of gratitude from my family. It’s something I’ve spoken about here in this chamber, but I never want to pass up an opportunity to be able to thank the brave men and women of our Canadian Armed Forces who, throughout the generations, have stepped forward for freedom, who have stood in defence of the values that we hold dear here in Canada—values of freedom, of equality, of democracy—and express that gratitude as someone who is a descendant of new Canadians, someone who has heard the stories from both sides of my grandparents of when the Canadians came to town.

I know many, many of us here in this House come from families who have moved to Canada in the not-too-distant past, who have come to Canada because they’ve seen the beacon of freedom that it is, the beacon of democracy and equality, and the beacon of opportunity for future generations.

My family moved to Canada for a number of reasons, of course, but one of the important reasons and one of the reasons Canada was the place that they chose to visit was because of the role of the Canadian Armed Forces in the Second World War. So I just want to begin by acknowledging the sacrifice of all those who currently serve and those who have served before those who are now in the military.

I want to provide a little bit of a background as to my family’s history, both on my opa’s and oma’s side, and my pake’s and beppe’s side. Those are Dutch and Frisian words for “grandpa” and “grandmother.” I grew up in a family where, regularly, as we approached Remembrance Day, my grandparents and my parents would sit me down, would sit my siblings down, and they would talk about the stories of my grandparents’ youth.

My grandparents were not that old in the Second World War. They lived in various parts of the Netherlands, some in the north, some in the farther south, and my pake wrote a book called *My Story*, by Andries Viersen—that’s my pake who lives in northern Alberta. In that book, he tells the story of himself as a young teenager in the Second World War and some of the challenges that they went through. He speaks about a lot of the things that would happen there, as he lived in the Netherlands during the course of the Second World War. They hid escaped POWs from the Nazis and passed them along on their way back from England.

They lived on a farm in the north, in Friesland, which, as you might know, is some of the area that was reclaimed. They were surrounded by polders and dikes because their soil had actually just been reclaimed, even in that century, so when they would be tilling the field they would be turning over seashells and it would be very sandy soil—good soil, but soil that was newly reclaimed from the sea.

When the Allied forces were coming through the Netherlands, the Nazi forces blew up their polders, so they flooded their farm. There are pictures in my pake's book of their whole family staying in the attic of the farmhouse, which was attached to their barn at the time—these old Dutch farmhouses. As the Allies were coming through, they were seeing the polders being blown up by the retreating Nazi forces and were eagerly anticipating the arrival of the Canadians—"The Canadians are coming. The Canadians are coming." That's a phrase that all four of my grandparents, who were, again, young teens at the time and grew up in different parts of the Netherlands—all four of them remember vividly when the Canadians came to town. My beppe always says, "They were so young. They were so young," and, of course, she was even younger than they were at the time—those brave men and women who rolled into town and who had been fighting for months since D-Day in 1944 to be able to free Europe from that scourge of Naziism.

It's also such a story where my oma tells about the hard winter. The Canadian Armed Forces, as well as the British and the Poles coming through the Netherlands in the fall of 1944—and I believe we've heard stories in this House about the Battle of the Scheldt Estuary. The estuary, of course, was an area between Antwerp and the Netherlands where, in November 1944, if my memory serves me correctly—it was muddy, it was cold, it was a very difficult battle. As the Canadians were moving through the southern Netherlands—and my grandmother, my oma, grew up in Eindhoven, which is pretty much in the middle of the Netherlands. They knew the Canadians were coming, and they were so excited, and then the advance stopped. In the late fall, early winter of 1944, it was so, so difficult, because they saw that the Canadians had made their way into Holland but that they were not able to advance any further because of the winter. That winter was an exceptionally hard winter. I'm sure that even those of you who are not of Dutch descent have heard of the hard winter of 1944-45. People were eating tulips. People were literally starving in the streets of the Netherlands due to a number of different reasons, but also the amount of food that was being taken out of the Netherlands and back to Germany at the time. It was an exceptionally difficult time.

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My grandmother also tells me about how the Canadians came and brought chocolate. Of course, in the time of rationing throughout the Second World War—that was not a time when there was a lot of chocolate around. So when the Canadians showed up and they had lots of cigarettes and chocolate, that was a very, very special time.

All four of my grandparents and my grandparents-in-law on my wife's side have these stories. They all vary slightly.

I think again of my pake telling stories about when they would have refugees coming from all the cities. They lived on a farm. They always kept a big bowl of soup in the kitchen so that when people would come—they weren't able to give everybody food, but they were able to give them a bowl of soup. I'm sure it wasn't an exceptionally

thick soup. But my family was very blessed by being able to be in the countryside, where there was more food than in the cities.

That story of deprivation but then of rescue, of joy at the sacrifice that the Canadian Armed Forces and the Allies were making to liberate these people who were thousands of kilometres away—this was a time before the Internet, FaceTime, Skype and all of these things. So for Canadians to leave their homeland here and travel thousands of kilometres across an ocean, braving the U-boats, the wolf packs of Hitler, to fight for freedom, to fight against the forces of tyranny, to free my grandparents, because they believed in those values of equality, of democracy, of freedom, of opportunity—those sacrifices have been ingrained deep into me, as a Canadian of Dutch heritage. Every day, I think about the fact that if it were not for those sacrifices, my life could be very, very different—the lives of my children and the lives of my ancestors, as well.

The reason I say that and tell a little bit of my personal story is because when we're debating legislation, such as the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, Bill 202, and this legislation's intent to provide more support for more Ontario veterans and their families, through assisting with health-related items and specialized equipment, such as hearing aids, wheelchairs and prosthetics; home-related items, such as mobility-related renovations and repair costs; personal items and employment-readiness supports, such as clothing and counselling—when we're debating these types of supports in place, I think it's important for all of us to take a step back and look at why we should be ensuring that these supports are in place. Of course, as a society, we have a burden on all of us to ensure that we're taking care of the most vulnerable in our society, but I firmly believe that we owe a substantial and greater level of debt towards those who have gone to serve, putting their lives on the line for each and every one of us to be able to even stand in this place and to be able to have something such as parliamentary immunity, the reality that we can stand in this House and speak without fear of retribution. We don't fear political interference in our ability to communicate the perspectives of our constituents.

I'm sure that many, many members who are here in this House—and we have a very diverse Legislature, I believe—on both sides of the aisle, who came to Canada because of the actions of the Canadian Armed Forces and because of the actions of the Canadian way of ensuring that we're protecting not just our own interests here in Canada, not just the interests of our borders and the isolationist mould, but we're willing to go, as the Canadian Armed Forces did for my family, thousands of kilometres away. They were willing to go and fight for what is right in order to ensure that people such as my grandparents—and the grandparents or parents or those who are in this chamber themselves—were able to enjoy the high standard of living that we have here in Canada.

Because of those types of sacrifices that have been made, Speaker, it's also important that we recognize the need to update legislation and to update a government

service such as the Soldiers' Aid Commission. I understand the last update to this particular piece of legislation was all the way back in 1960. Of course, we've seen a lot of changes since 1960, and we've also seen a lot more veterans. I wish it wasn't the case that we had to see that. We all wish that we wouldn't have had the additional conflicts that we have seen.

When Canadians have been called upon to defend freedom and to stand up for human rights at home and abroad, Canadians have answered that call. They have gone abroad. We've seen that also as recently as Afghanistan and as recently as people helping to train soldiers in Ukraine. We've also seen training missions throughout the Middle East, and of course, Canada's contributions to the United Nations peacekeeping efforts.

Those types of efforts that our Armed Forces go through—we also need to ensure that we at all levels of government are not just giving them recognition, not just wearing a pin on Remembrance Day, not just wearing a poppy at the beginning of November, but also coming forward with practical ways that we can provide support. That's really the key motivation for this legislation.

I want to thank the minister who brought this forward. I want to thank his parliamentary assistant, as well, for working on this. I know the parliamentary assistant and the minister both come from families who have a great deal of respect for the military. They represent communities, I believe, that have large military components. In Ottawa, of course, there's an enormous amount of Armed Forces working on the administrative side. And then very close to the minister—I believe Borden is very close to him as well. There's a lot of relevance to these members' particular ridings, and they brought that forward in the passion for this legislation.

I think in recognizing this legislation—the preamble says it very well. It reads, "All Ontarians recognize the great contributions and sacrifices that veterans have made to Ontario and to Canada. Since the establishment of the Soldiers' Aid Commission in 1915"—105 years ago—"Ontario has honoured the service of veterans to the nation, and supported veterans and their families in need. Ontario remains committed to carrying on the legacy of the commission in order to help meet the modern and changing needs of veterans and their families."

Speaker, I recognize that the federal government has primary jurisdiction when it comes to ensuring supports for our veterans. I recognize that Veterans Affairs Canada has a very active role in that regard, and the federal government, of course, ensures that they are supported both with equipment and after their service as well, that they receive what they deserve in order to ensure that they can maintain a quality of life that we expect for those who have gone and put their lives on the line. But the reality is that all of us, even here in this provincial House, have to work together to ensure the tremendous sacrifice that was made for our province and our country is recognized. We have to work hard, as a government, to make sure that we are there for them when they need us.

We've seen veterans and their families face many challenges, whether that's post-traumatic stress disorder,

physical injury, unemployment and homelessness, all while trying to navigate a complex support system—and it is complex.

The Soldiers' Aid Commission, which was first created, as mentioned, in 1915, was initially meant to support Ontario veterans returning home from the First World War. It was later expanded to support those who had served in the Second World War and the Korean War. As part of this plan, we recognize—although there are fewer and fewer every year—veterans who fought in those wars. I believe there are none from the First World War and fewer and fewer every year who have been in the Second World War and in the war in Korea. We have a duty to ensure that we're extending the supports possible to all our veterans, to all Ontario veterans, no matter where they have served.

We're recognizing as well that this is, of course, restricted to those who have served Canada, not those who have fought in the armed forces of other nations.

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I want to also note that we are going to be increasing our investment in this commission, and that matters, because it's not just about the dollars and cents. I recognize that, but we have to put money where our mouth is as well. We have to make sure that those funds are able to flow to those who need them.

I want to thank Colin Rowe, who is the chair of the Soldiers' Aid Commission, for his work when it comes to this legislation and the work that the commission does. Those who are serving on the board of this commission are doing so from a place of wanting to also assist their comrades—those they have served with, and those who have served after them or before them—in order to ensure that they are receiving the supports they deserve.

But as mentioned, the average age of a Second World War veteran in Canada is 94 years old, so quite old, as well as the fact that the average Korean War veteran is 87. We are losing those who have fought for us. We're losing those who have stood on the line to defend our freedom, but we have had new generations of veterans come forward whom we also have a duty to support. We have a duty to provide them with the care they deserve, and these are not extravagant things.

There are about 230,000 veterans who live in Ontario, and 93% of these veterans served after the Korean War, meaning that 93% of these 230,000 do not have access to the existing Soldiers' Aid Commission. That's obviously a significant number of veterans who are working, living or serving in various ways in their community.

Even looking at my local Legions, I'm just filled with gratitude for my local Legions who consistently, as we've seen even through this pandemic—whether it's Branch 613 in Beamsville, branches in Fonthill or branches in Smithville, so many of these branches of the Royal Canadian Legion have stepped forward, many of them veterans, to support the community. Whether it was holding fundraisers, whether it was delivering meals to seniors in the community—honestly, it's things as simple as holding a drive-through Friday night fish fry where

people were able to get out a little bit, even if wasn't the typical sit-down with 100 of your closest friends, so to speak, but it was more of a drive-through. These are important organizations, and they're run by wonderful people, so any way that we can support them is vital.

I know that the amounts that we're talking about are not enormous. We're talking about up to \$2,000 a year when it comes to the supports in place for assistive devices, but again, we believe it's important that these types of supports are still available, because \$2,000 a year can help with some of the needs, on top of what they're able to access through Veterans Affairs Canada and through other agencies.

I want to leave more of the specifics of this legislation to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle who are going to be speaking about it. I just want to acknowledge again and pay tribute to the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces who are currently serving and those who have served, and to recognize the debt of gratitude that I and all of us here in this place owe to those who have fought and died. We have to ensure that those who are living, whether they served in the Korean War, the Second World War or any war since, are given the proper supports they deserve.

Thank you for your attention this afternoon, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you.

We now have time for questions and comments. I return to the member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Speaker, and thanks to the member from Niagara West for his 20 minutes on this piece of legislation.

The one question that I have which you didn't touch on is the amount of new veterans this program will serve versus the amount of new money. I'm trying to find a correlation here. The program will serve almost 12 times more veterans, which is excellent; its budget, though, is only increasing by six times. Will that be enough to ensure no veteran is denied support from this program due to the fact that we under-supported it, and how is the government going to manage that on a go-forward basis?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: It's a very important question. I don't want to speak for the minister, but I can say that I understand we will make sure that anyone who needs any services through this program will receive the funding that is necessary for the program to be able to provide that support.

I would note that the needs of particular veterans often increase as they age, so those who are in their eighties or nineties may have greater health needs than younger veterans, particularly those who may have served in the military for 10 years, 15 years in their twenties and thirties, and then are also still, now, in either another career or working in another area, so the needs under this commission won't be as great as those who have aged. So it's not that it's going to have 12 times the demand right away, just because of the nature of many of those veterans; it's not that they are in their eighties and nineties, such as those from the Korean War. But we will ensure that any veteran

who needs to access supports under this program will receive the support that they need.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Mr. Aris Babikian: It is fantastic to hear that far more veterans will be eligible for supports and assistance than before through this legislation. However, I do have a question. You have made clear that much has changed in the world since the Soldiers' Aid Commission was first founded. We have a great deal more understanding of the challenges soldiers endure, both while they are active service members and as they transition back to civilian life. Can you speak to how the services offered through the Soldiers' Aid Commission can be updated through this legislation?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Yes, absolutely, and I want to thank the member for Scarborough—Agincourt for his question. One of the key pieces to this is that we are expanding the eligibility criteria to ensure that more veterans are eligible for the supports, but we're also expanding the list of eligible expenses. The list currently is quite restrictive, and so we want to ensure that some of those restrictions are lifted in order to allow more to be able to access the particulars of this fund, whether that includes things such as employment readiness supports or short-term training or courses; things such as work tools, even, and clothing for a job interview. There are a number of different expenses that have been added to it, as well as ensuring that the commission is modernized through expanding the eligibility.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question goes to the member from Toronto Centre.

Ms. Suze Morrison: I want to thank the member from Niagara West for his presentation. My question to you is, how does your bill address the shameful history that Canada and Ontario has of its treatment—and in fact mistreatment—of Indigenous veterans? Specifically, when we look back at the history, when Indigenous vets came home, they weren't given the same sorts of resources or supports or housing or services as non-Indigenous veterans. In fact, many were disenfranchised, stripped of their status and forced to relocate out of their communities into urban centres, which, as I'm sure you're aware, is very closely tied to the history of the Friendship Centre Movement.

How does your bill support First Nations veterans? More specifically, when we look at the situation happening down in Six Nations right now, in terms of the land claim and the land dispute that's going on there, we have to remember that that land claim was closely connected to the fact that it was the Haudenosaunee that came to the defence of the British in the War of 1812 and that those warriors have been left behind—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The member for Niagara West to respond.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I want to thank the member for Toronto Centre for the question. Obviously, there are portions of our history that we recognize with shame. We should have done better as a country, and we recognize that as an especially important area when it comes to

ensuring that our Indigenous veterans have been recognized, and not only recognized but supported for the contributions that they've made to Canada in supporting Canadian values of opportunity and equality and freedom. And so I want to extend my thanks to them, as to all veterans, and also recognize that this particular benefit that we're speaking about when it comes to the soldiers' commission has to work in collaboration with many of the other services that you've talked about, whether that's ensuring that they can access supports through Veterans Affairs Canada or ensuring that they can access supports also through the Royal Canadian Legion, and of course working with our counterparts in all levels of government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Mississauga Milton—Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Mississauga—Malton, the place of the greater Toronto airport, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I want to say thank you to the member from Niagara West for speaking on the Ontario Soldiers' Aid Commission.

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Mr. Speaker, we have quickly seen the value of programs such as the Elevate Plus Military pilot announced by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, which is helping members of the Canadian Armed Forces transition to civilian life and leverage their talent—something that they have learned and implemented over the time they were in the commission—by teaching soft skills, technical skills and providing paid job placements.

To the member: Can you please speak to how the Soldiers' Aid Commission will complement this type of employment readiness program?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thanks to the member for the question. It's a very important question. I actually have four cousins who served in the armed forces—they all still currently serve—but I also hear from them regularly about some of their colleagues who have served and have difficulty in transitioning into civilian life, and that can be very challenging.

We need to recognize that social assistance is about being compassionate towards people's needs, and it also ensures that they will become more self-sufficient in helping them to look for and find jobs and to build those opportunities. Part of the intent of this commission is to ensure that we're able to transform the system to make it easier to use and also to ensure, as I spoke about, the expansion of the eligibility criteria for what is an eligible expense so that those who are applying for that are able to access the resources they need to make that transition.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The question goes to the member from Timmins.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you to the member for your presentation. First of all, I appreciate, as the son and the nephew of men who fought in the war and who fought in Holland—the Falaise Gap and various battles that ensued were battles where some of my family fought, and they suffered PTSD until the day they died as a result of some of the stuff they saw there.

But the question I want to ask is about today's soldier. I think you and I will agree that the federal government

doesn't do enough to support soldiers, especially those who have been traumatized as a result of their experiences in places like Afghanistan and others. One of the things I wonder about this bill, and the question I want to ask you, is, why didn't the government go further provincially in order to provide support, both medical and financial to a certain degree, to those particular veterans across Canada who have suffered as a result of their experiences in theatres of war?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I think the answer to that is the need to look at the other organizations that are in this space and work collaboratively with them. I think one of the pieces that we have to recognize is that we're not going to, as a government, come in and say, "Okay, the Ontario government now is going to become the new Veterans Affairs office, and we're going to be the ones who are taking responsibility for these issues." What we're trying to do is supplement and assist both the federal government and other organizations, whether those are the Royal Canadian Legion, Dominion Command or other groups to ensure that these organizations—which, frankly, take their responsibility extremely seriously and do important work in this regard. We're not trying to usurp any of that jurisdiction; we're not usurping those particular roles that they have and that they have developed expertise in. We're not creating a brand new ministry within the provincial government. We're trying to improve upon and utilize and expand access to an existing government service that we can then improve and ensure more people are supported.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It is a pleasure to join the debate on government Bill 202, the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act.

Before I begin, I do feel like I definitely need to thank and honour the work that our critic on this particular bill has done, MPP Jennie Stevens. I was here in the House when she gave her one-hour lead on this piece of legislation. There is no doubt that she has a personal and emotional connection to the service and she's very proud of her son who also serves, and she brings a level of credibility to this file because she walks the walk. I feel that she has actually raised the profile of the issues that veterans experience in the province of Ontario.

I know a lot of people in the past have said, "Well, this is primarily a federal responsibility," but a soldier is a soldier is a soldier. We owe them a debt of gratitude, and we certainly have a social responsibility and, I would argue, a moral responsibility to ensure that they are cared for.

We welcome Bill 202, and of course we will be supporting it. Our critic said that the language is a very promising start. Stakeholders feel very relieved that something is finally happening on this file. Our goal is to ensure that anyone who served our country does not have to contend with poverty and homelessness, ensuring the eradication of poverty and homelessness for all veterans.

I do think it's important for us to also mention that the poverty piece and that lens that we bring to this debate is

important, because there are many soldiers, men and women, who enter the service to access career pathways, to access education, to access opportunities that they are denied because of their social and financial status in the province. When they go and they fight or they're part of a peacekeeping mission and then they come back and are not whole, as they were when they left, we owe them a debt of gratitude, and we have to make sure that those resources are there.

This bill is really the result of decades of advocacy by veterans and veteran organizations. It is a credit, obviously, to our critic on this, who worked with these groups to bring this issue forward in the House last year. As I mentioned, she brings a level of honesty and sincerity and genuine connection to that community. She brought their voices right here to this Legislature by way of questions that she asked of the government around the Soldiers' Aid Commission which, to date, had been excluding younger veterans. She did this as early as last October and November. She brought those voices here to this Legislature, and that is one of the most important things that we can do as legislators. It actually is our responsibility to be inclusive.

All of us, I know, as Remembrance Day comes upon us on November 11, will be missing some of the events that we participate in on an annual basis. I know you're a member of your Legion. I think both you and I had our victory parties at Legions; it was a celebration of democracy. This November, though, is going to be very different.

As we're approaching the 4 o'clock part, I just want to say, if you look across this province and you look at who the volunteers are in our communities, you will often find veterans. You will find folks, men and women alike, who have served abroad and have come home, and they still have that very strong sense of duty and loyalty, from the men and women who have served. The veterans who I've come to know over the years—one we lost almost two years ago, Don Balcarras, 93 years old. I wish I could buy Don one more beer at the Legion—and one more question, one more story. I wish I could see him dance with his wife. I also want to give a special shout-out to Mel Barrie, who also has served and is an active part of Hockey Helps the Homeless. And so they continue: Veterans and those who have served in the military or the navy continue to serve their communities.

Every year—I don't know if you have this, Speaker—we go on the bus and we go from Legion to Legion, or our naval association or Wing 404, and we get a chance to buy a veteran a beer at every stop. That's the bus, I must say. But this year, I will miss going to Wing 404, the K-W Naval Association, the Fred Gies Branch 50, Branch 412, the Polish veterans' branch—they have very good food, I might add. We always raise many funds. The poppy fund is a major part of Remembrance Day, and it will be interesting to see how that plays itself out in the province of Ontario this year. Many people don't know that the poppy fund actually also donates money to veterans—sometimes hospital beds, sometimes medical equipment. It's an important fundraising initiative that I think we should all support in any way that we can. I'm going to miss spending some time at Branch 530 this year.

I also want to say that my grandfather, Ernest Morgan, fought in World War II. He came back from that war. He was injured. He was a mechanic by trade. My mother tells me that money was always an issue after the war and veterans were not always supported as much as they should have been. As a mechanic, he was on a bartering system, like for a pig or for chickens. This is our history and it needs to be acknowledged in this House, that those supports were not always there. I hope that he would be proud.

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One final thing, as we contemplate this piece of legislation, this is one of my favourite Remembrance Day quotes: "The living owe it to those who no longer can speak to tell their story for them." I feel that our critic, MPP Stevens, brings that sincerity and that genuine desire to see greater change and positive energy for our veterans.

I think it's important to understand how we got here, though, because the member from Niagara West didn't go into that too much. Some of those stories that our critic brought to this Legislature by way of questions to the government last fall still resonate with us: "The Ontario Soldiers' Aid Commission, the province's emergency grant program for veterans, turns away veterans of recent conflicts while returning most of its budget unspent every year to the government."

I remember very clearly MPP Stevens raising this. People were outraged by it, as they should be. We should be outraged that there was money to assist with soldiers, but because they were younger soldiers, younger veterans, they were disqualified from accessing this: "The provincial law it works under was last updated in 1970 and doesn't let it give money to veterans of any conflict more recent than Korea. So while veterans of more recent wars often ask the volunteer board for help, none can be given grants."

"The Soldiers' Aid Commission, Canada's only provincial veterans' program, can grant veterans up to \$2,000 to deal with emergencies such as rent payments, home repairs or moving costs. For veterans who qualify" it has filled a gap, since Veterans Affairs Canada, until recently, didn't "provide one-off payments to meet specific needs."

"The vast majority of veterans who do qualify" can access some funding. "But over 60% of the commission's \$253,000 budget goes unspent for lack of qualified applicants."

One soldier, Mr. Tescione—this is one of the stories that we have spoken about here in this House: "Tescione, now 48, was wounded in Croatia in 1994 when a group of Serbian soldiers opened fire on a vehicle he was riding in with another soldier."

"The soldiers' lives were saved by their body armour and the mass of the vehicle, though Tescione was shot six times in the head and arms, and has struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder ever since."

"One of the bullets pulled out of him, he points out, was a Second World War-era Mauser round."

"Today, the group of veterans the commission can legally give money to is shrinking and increasingly

elderly”—and this has been raised before. “The average living Canadian veteran of the Korean War is 86, and the average living Canadian veteran of the Second World War is 93.

“Their numbers are falling fast”—and so there is an urgency to have this piece of legislation passed and have it be actionable.

Another soldier’s story that our critic brought to the floor of the Legislature was that of Phillip Kitchen: “A year after he left the military, Phillip Kitchen found himself living in a tent in a Kingston campground with his wife, his son—who was less than a year old” at the time.

“He had come back from Afghanistan with post-traumatic stress disorder and had been present at the 2002” incident in which an American war plane mistakenly bombed Canadian troops, killing one soldier and wounding several others.

He says, “I didn’t want to leave the military at all, but being classified as non-deployable, the writing was on the wall at that time....

“Within a year of his return, a son was born prematurely and” passed away. “Kitchen ended up kicked out of the military in 2008 for testing positive for THC.

“After running out of the money from military pension contributions he cashed out, Kitchen’s family moved into the tent. Luckily, it was springtime. Kitchen and his wife tried not to let their stress show....

“We didn’t know what the next day was going to bring,” he remembers. “We had all our stuff in storage, and we slowly were piecing it out to pawnshops and selling it wherever we could to get the money just to put food in the cooler, and ice in the cooler to keep the food” safe.

I have to say, this story should shock us all. It was a wake-up call for legislators in this province to know that someone who had served this country was so lost and forgotten, quite honestly, by not only the federal government but also the provincial government. That’s how I feel sometimes—when we take our place in this House, we have the opportunity to actually right a wrong.

“The family’s ordeal ended when Kitchen’s discharge category was changed and he started getting payments from Veterans Affairs.”

We could talk all day about Veterans Affairs. There has been some progress, but lots of work still has to happen.

He said, “It’s sad that they send a new batch of soldiers into a conflict but forget to update laws to support them when they need it. It’s very unfortunate that nothing was changed.” That’s what we get a chance to do today. I don’t know if the other members are interested, but it’s a chance to actually make change.

I should cite this. This is from a Global piece from last fall. They did an FOI, because in order to address a problem, you have to actually admit that the problem exists and then have the data and the evidence to address it. So Global asked the Ontario social services ministry, which runs the program, for these statistics: How many people are being turned away? How many people qualify? What are they qualifying for? But they refused to provide this information: “It would also not provide copies of two

mandate reviews of the program carried out in 2002 and 2015, telling Global News that finding them would involve ‘an extended amount of manual work.’” So it was too much work for the ministry when this request came in to find out how many veterans were being denied assistance and what they were requesting. Of course, this issue of mandate letters continues. It’s still before the courts.

“Of the veterans Global News contacted for this story, all of whom lived in Ontario, none had ever heard of the” Soldiers’ Aid Commission. They’d never heard of it. Help was out there, but they didn’t know how to access it and nobody was pointing them in that direction—“including Tescione, who worked for years as a veteran peer counsellor.” This was someone who was in the field, so to speak, part of the solution, and he didn’t have any idea that the Soldiers’ Aid Commission had resources to share with soldiers—big problem.

“In 2018—and this is for stats—“the city of Toronto said that 11% of the city’s outdoor homeless population reported having served in the military in some way.”

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I’m sorry to interrupt the member from Waterloo, but on the government side there are three or four different conversations going on. I’m having trouble listening. I have to hear what’s being said. It’s a very important bill introduced by your minister. I’d ask you to keep it down, please. Thank you.

I return to the member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that.

“In 2018 ... 11% of the city’s outdoor homeless population reported having served in the military....” That’s shocking.

“One percent of Toronto’s overall homeless population, or about 90” to 100 “people, reported military service outside Canada.”

The government really was confronted with this data, and when you do that as a good legislator, as our MPP is, you have to face the truth, you have to face the facts, and, if you do so in a way with evidence and with research, then the government has no choice but to act.

“Opposition veterans’ affairs critic Jennie Stevens called the restrictions an ‘unfair loophole.’” We have a chance to close the loophole today, which is a good thing.

“The fact that Ontario routinely and unjustly denies modern-day veterans the support that older veterans can access is wrong ... It’s discriminatory and it has to change.

““Veterans answered a call to serve our nation and to protect the innocent. They didn’t let us down, and the province shouldn’t let them down.””

I think it’s important to acknowledge that the Soldiers’ Aid Commission is a volunteer-run commission and has stretched its mandate in other ways. They’ve tried to be creative. We’ve heard some of those stories from our critic. As she said, once you have a solution to a problem that is before the House—and in these times in particular, when we now should have a full understanding that our

collective health, well-being and safety is connected to one another—then we have a duty to act. I found that to be very profound.

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There are, however, some outstanding questions that we have with regard to Bill 202. The government will talk about what services are already there and how you navigate some of those services, but the truth is that accessing social services in the province of Ontario is incredibly complex. It is not a user-friendly service.

Our outstanding questions related to the ODSP claw-back are:

Will this government ensure that this program won't claw back support down the road, especially when a disability might have been endured protecting our country? It's a valid question. Veterans should not have to think that accepting emergency support today means they will have to pay for it tomorrow. So when this piece of legislation goes to committee, that will be one of the jobs that we have. I trust our critic to take that on.

Will this government ensure that we create firm goals in regulation for this legislation, going forward, so that any future government can't play around with it, so we actually embed it as a principle of this Legislature? There are some peripherals outstanding, which I have already raised, in that—so the amount of new veterans this program will serve versus the amount of new money. If this program will increase the amount of veterans who can access the funding by 12 times, why is the budget only increasing by six times? You can have the best intentions, but if you don't show up with the money, it actually won't work. We need to make sure that no veteran is denied support from this program due to the fact that it has been under-supported.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say, as Remembrance Day comes, as it does every year—and it will be very different this year—this is an opportunity for us to pass a piece of legislation, to fast-track it, to fix it at committee in an accelerated manner, to make sure that every man and woman who served this country comes back home and knows that we have their back, and that if they require additional emergency funding, that the Soldiers' Aid Commission can act quickly, knowing they have the resources to ensure that we never have to say no to another soldier, as has happened in the past. We can right that wrong today, we can honour our veterans, and we can demonstrate that this is the time and the place to do so.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We've listened for 20 minutes to the member of Waterloo, and now we have an opportunity for a designated 10 minutes to pose questions. I turn first to the member from Brantford–Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate the speech from the member from Waterloo. I did miss the beginning of it—sorry, I came in the House a little bit late this afternoon—but I appreciate your support for veterans and the stories that you shared with us.

We are committed fully to making supports for our veterans more accessible than they have ever been, and

ensuring veterans are able to participate in their communities even during these difficult times. This act, at its core, is about accessibility. We are making supports through the Soldiers' Aid Commission, which includes personal care, prosthetics and medical costs, available to all Ontario veterans, regardless of where and when they served.

Would the member opposite agree that this expansion of service, covering more than 200,000 Ontario veterans, is going to make a significant impact for veterans across the province? I think I know your answer, but I'm happy to hear it.

Ms. Catherine Fife: This issue came up when the member from St. Catharines, our critic on this issue, spoke in her hour lead. Without a doubt, if you wanted to increase this budget today, if you wanted to pass this legislation today, if you wanted to make sure that the Soldiers' Aid Commission had every resource today to make sure that we never had to say no to another soldier, we would do that right now, because that is our responsibility as legislators—not just our moral responsibility, but there's a financial and fiscal responsibility component of this as well, especially given the levels of homelessness that we are seeing with veterans.

So the answer to your question is yes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question goes to the member for Beaches–East York.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: As the member has noticed, the levels of homelessness have reached crisis proportions across Ontario. I'm interested to know whether the member believes that this bill will solve poverty and homelessness for Ontario's veterans. If not, what exactly does the government need to do to make sure that it does?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much for the question.

I have to say, when I read that in the city of Toronto 11% of the city's outdoor homeless population reported having served in the military, I was shocked to hear that. I think that some people, myself included, assume that those supports are there, and it teaches us a lesson that you should never assume that people are doing the right thing at the right time.

We need a strategic plan around housing in the province of Ontario—which is funded, purpose-built, affordable housing with supports. That's a job creation strategy in and of itself. So invest the money in affordable housing, make it supportive, tailor it to the needs of veterans, and let's make sure that no veteran has to sleep in a tent with his wife and child ever again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question goes to the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: It's great to be able to join this debate.

Our veterans are so important to all of our communities, and our government wants to be there to support our veterans. That's why we modernized the Soldiers' Aid Commission. It will provide support for counselling and other personal support services.

With veterans suffering from chronic conditions, including depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder, at rates higher than the civilian population, I'd like to ask the member to share her thoughts on our government adding mental health supports as one of the supports accessible through the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I don't think anybody in this House could stand in their place and deny the importance of mental health resources in 2020. The fact that it has taken so long—since 1970—to update this piece of legislation speaks for itself.

There was a time when PTSD was thought to be a weakness. We now know that admitting that you need help is a sign of courage on the mental health file. We also now have a duty to respond to that in a meaningful way—not just with words, not just with a mental health day. We actually need to make sure that the resources are there.

The modernization of the Soldiers' Aid Commission obviously needs to be supported to deliver those mental health resources in a meaningful and timely way, because as the soldiers have spoken to us and told us their stories, we have to be respectful of their truth.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Next question?

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you to the member from Waterloo for your comments.

My grandfather also fought in the war and came back, and our family had to live with the generational trauma of the mental health issues that he sustained in the war, which was very, very common.

When we look at this Conservative government's record on funding and supports not just for veterans but for mental health, specifically, we saw that in the first year of their mandate they cut more than \$330 million of planned spending for mental health.

Can you elaborate a little bit more on how we don't just need to support veterans in this specific bill—but more broadly in our system, through, as you've spoken to, more investments in housing and mental health?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much for the question.

The member makes a very good point: Saying that you will support veterans in a meaningful way with mental health, with PTSD, with hearing aids or wheelchairs or glasses or home-related items—these things actually have to exist. The mental health resources have to be out in the community for them to access. There is obviously a disconnect. If those resources are not being funded by the provincial government—because mental health is a responsibility of the provincial government—and you're saying that you value these resources for veterans, then make them available in the community and fund mental health in the province of Ontario in a holistic and inclusive manner which includes veterans, Indigenous communities and the broader community as a whole.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Ottawa West—Nepean.

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Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate the member opposite's remarks, and I apologize for any disturbance I might have caused during those remarks. It is a very important topic to be debating, and I appreciate the exchange that's happening in the chamber today.

My question is about the employment readiness aspect that's been added into this bill. I wonder if the member opposite could comment on whether or not she thinks it's positive that we have added in employment readiness as one of the categories that can be spent on using the Soldiers' Aid Commission and how this new measure could perhaps help some of our veterans who are looking for ways to re-enter the workforce.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Excellent question.

Employment readiness is predicated on housing, on mental health supports, on having accessibility issues addressed. I'm very pleased to see employment readiness mentioned in this piece of legislation, but that goal of employment readiness will be further hampered if veterans are living in a tent outside city hall.

We have to make sure that there's a holistic strategy around ensuring that affordable housing, supportive housing options, mental health resources and health care are built into the employment readiness goal, which veterans have said to us. They want to be part of society, they want to come back and they want to serve. I've already mentioned how much they volunteer. Let's support them by ensuring that they have a roof over their heads.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for one final question and response. I turn to the member from Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Waterloo.

It's timely that we're debating this, because we filmed our Remembrance Day ceremony in Sudbury over the weekend—and I was standing there with Shane Cusack and Will Morin. Will is a family friend for many, many years. Shane and I worked together for over 10 years at the smelter. I just think about how personal this is.

Many of us have talked about family members. Both of my grandparents, for example, served. My father served.

I sit normally, outside of COVID-19, beside our critic—I'm not allowed to use her name, but I'll call her Maverick.

Our role is to be the eagle and look for ways to improve a bill. What would you recommend as an easy thing that we could do to improve it? Is it the overall budget? Is it the accessibility of the forms, the awareness of it? Is it that the yearly cap has to be increased? What would you recommend as something simple the government can do to improve this bill?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you to the member from Sudbury for that question.

There are good bones here, and the language is promising, as our maverick critic from St. Catharines has said, but there will come a time when the resources have to match the goals of the legislation. There has to be a very

clear, streamlined path whereby people who are in the field can direct veterans to access this.

Let's make sure that our younger veterans know that the province of Ontario has their back and that no one is ever going to say no to a veteran again when they have put out their hand and asked for help, be it for mental health, housing or employment options.

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

Mr. Billy Pang: I'm here today to speak about the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, 2020. As a government and province, we acknowledge the tremendous sacrifice our veterans have made to our province and our country. They served our country and helped protect our democratic freedom.

The Soldiers' Aid Commission was created in 1915, which was over 100 years ago, to support Ontario veterans returning home from the First World War. The commission helped veterans adjust to a rapidly changing economy, helped the injured get training for new careers after serious injuries, and took care of children without parents of their own to care for them. It was later when the commission was expanded to support those who had served in the Second World War and the Korean War.

With each passing year, it is a sad reality that the number of living veterans who have served in those wars are decreasing. While we never forget their bravery and sacrifice, it is time we honoured a new generation of servicemen and women.

In the previous year, the Soldiers' Aid Commission provided support to 53 veterans. While veterans' assistance programs are primarily a federal responsibility, the Soldiers' Aid Commission is the only provincially funded financial assistance program in Canada specifically for veterans.

The Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, 2020, if passed, will expand eligibility to all Ontario veterans and their families. It will expand eligible expenses to include employment readiness supports, such as short-term courses or training, work tools and clothing for a job interview. It would modernize the commission and its mandate, as well as update the eligibility criteria.

To ensure this reaches the next generation of servicemen and women, the government is proposing to increase its investment in the Soldiers' Aid Commission by \$1.3 million to more than \$1.5 million annually. A modern soldiers' commission would help more of our heroes in need receive important support.

If passed, it would include two important expansions of services: the first being employment support and the second being mental health supports. As part of our government's help, it will also help more of our heroes in need to pay for health-related items and specialized equipment, such as hearing aids and prescription drugs; home-related items, such as mobility-related renovations; specialized equipment, such as assistive devices, wheelchairs and prosthetics; and personal items, such as clothing and specialized support services.

In addition to expanded eligibility and eligible expenses, our government also explored a new simplified financial needs test and a streamlined application process and payment modernization.

Mr. Speaker, veterans and their families can face many challenges. In relation to health, statistics have shown that veterans suffer from chronic conditions at rates greater than the civilian population: 29% of the veterans reported arthritis, 21% reported depression, 15% reported anxiety, and 14% reported post-traumatic stress disorder.

According to a 38-year observational study on suicidality in veterans, Veterans Affairs Canada reported that male veterans have a 1.4 times greater risk of dying by suicide than other male civilian counterparts, and female veterans have a 1.9 times greater risk of dying by suicide than their female civilian counterparts. These statistics demonstrate some of the driving forces and factors for modernizing the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

As an elected official from my riding of Markham–Unionville, I have had the pleasure to attend events dedicated to honour our veterans. Some of the ceremonies and services include the Remembrance Day service hosted by the city of Markham, the Remembrance Day ceremony hosted by the Unionville BIA, the Battle of Hong Kong ceremony hosted by the Royal Hong Kong Regiment Ontario Association, and the Remembrance Day ceremony hosted by the Markham District Veterans Association.

I want to take this time to acknowledge some of our courageous veterans of Markham–Unionville who are still with us today: World War II D-Day veteran Stan Hems; retired Lieutenant Colonel Surjit Basarke of the Canadian army 2nd Field Engineer Regiment; and Brian Webb of the Royal Army Medical Corps.

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As an immigrant from Hong Kong, I also want to take the time to show respect and sadly share that Mr. Sai Ming Ng, who was the last Hong Kong soldier to serve in the Battle of Hong Kong in World War II, passed away two days ago, on October 4, at the age of 98. Among the 1,974 Canadian soldiers who were deployed to serve in this battle, I am also sad to share that across Canada only seven veterans are still with us today.

As an elected official for Markham–Unionville, I am fortunate to have a strong community leader, Larry Lau, as part of my team. Larry is a veteran of the British Armed Forces and currently serving as Sergeant-at-Arms at the Markham District Veterans Association. One of his duties is to lower the flag of the building to half-mast when a member or dignitary sadly passes away. Every time Larry lowers the flag and sees the number of veterans depleting, his heart saddens.

Our brave and selfless heroes and their families have sacrificed tremendously for our province and country. As our government continued to listen to the input of veterans and the current commissioners of the Soldiers' Aid Commission and others as this legislation was developed, our government continued to move quickly to deliver on our commitment to veterans.

Mr. Speaker, our last Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, 1960, was last amended in 1970. Our government will continue to stand behind each and every one of our heroes who has served in our Armed Forces, and a modernized and expanded Soldiers' Aid Commission is our province's way of thanking all Ontario veterans and their families for their service and contribution to our province and country.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for questions.

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank the member from Markham–Unionville. I thought it was a great debate because he made it so personable by talking about his constituents, people who had served, in the conversation.

My question would be similar to the question I asked the member for Waterloo earlier on ways to improve the bill. I know there are some concerns that perhaps the budget doesn't match how much it may increase, as more awareness comes out of it. What simple thing are you hoping might come to committee, when this is moved forward, that could improve the bill, from feedback that you've heard from your constituents?

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you to the opposition party member for the great questions.

You know that as we developed this bill, the commission wanted to help veterans and their families. So for the first time a modernized Soldiers' Aid Commission will provide financial assistance for, number one, support services, including counselling, as well as employment services that will help our veterans put their skills to use. There was a time when I joined the IBM initiative for retraining those veterans, and it was a very exciting experience for me.

The second is the health-related items. When they were deployed, they had to deal with a lot of different situations, so we will help them when they have health situations. We'll give them hearing aids, glasses, prescriptions and dental needs.

Also, home-related items, specialized equipment and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you.

The next question goes to the member for Scarborough Centre.

Miss Christina Maria Mitas: Thank you to the member from Markham–Unionville for his remarks.

It's fantastic to hear that far more veterans will be eligible for supports and assistance than were before thanks to this legislation; however, I do have a question. You've made clear that much has changed in the world since the Soldiers' Aid Commission was first founded. We have a great deal more understanding of the challenges that soldiers endure now, both while they're active service members and as they transition back to civilian life. Can you speak to how the services offered through the Soldiers' Aid Commission will be updated through this new legislation?

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you, member, for the question. Yes, you are absolutely right: The needs of modern-day veterans are changing. During the war in Afghanistan, more than 40,000 Canadian soldiers fought with courage

and honour to defend our values and keep the world safe, and we know that recently released veterans with high rates of service in Afghanistan were more likely to report difficulty adjusting to civilian life. So as part of our modernization of the commission, we are ensuring veterans accessing this program will be able to receive modernized support.

We know that mental health supports are vital to ensuring veterans are able to adjust to the difference between military service and civilian life, which is why we are expanding eligible service to include enhancements in other personal support services.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question goes to the member from Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: Again, my question is for the member from Markham–Unionville. I was surprised reading through this and the research on it, because originally it was limited to members of the Korean War, so it's definitely overdue for an update. I did the math: It was 67 years ago that the Korean War ended, and if you were 18, if you had just been able to join the Korean War, you'd be 85 years old today, which probably explains why a lot of people aren't aware of it.

My question is about the homelessness. It's estimated that about 11%, maybe a little bit higher, of outdoor homeless in Toronto are veterans. As this bill is passed, and as things are improved for these veterans and it's widened in scope, what is the plan to get the message out to the people who are homeless and who are veterans and perhaps, as you said earlier, are experiencing mental health issues?

Mr. Billy Pang: I thank the member for the question. As I mentioned, this legislation, this commission, has not been updated for—how many years? Fifty years, I believe. So we believe that this act is very important because we have to modernize the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

As you mentioned, they are facing a lot of different challenges, and we introduced this legislation to repeal and replace the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, 1960. Our Legislature will expand the eligibility to all Ontarian veterans and their families, and expand eligible expenses to include employment readiness support, such as short-term courses or training, so that they can stand up by themselves. We modernized the commission and its mandate and updated the eligibility criteria.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question.

Mr. Will Bouma: I'm pleased to rise again in the House and ask another question on this important piece of legislation.

It struck me, when I got to be part of the Agency Review Task Force, going back to the beginning of our mandate, that as we looked at this agency, we really had some holes here, because the way it was structured as a measure of last resort, it was very difficult for any past military members to actually take advantage of it. So I'm very pleased to see that Ontario stepped up to play a role, alongside the federal government, in supporting our brave veterans.

I've heard that other jurisdictions, such as New Brunswick, Alberta and Saskatchewan, also have support programs available. How is Ontario's approach, and, by extension, the Soldiers' Aid Commission, unique?

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you for the great question. The uniqueness of this act is that, yes, other jurisdictions have their supports to the veterans. However, this is the only province that is providing financial support to our veterans, and this is the only jurisdiction across Canada that has this type of support to our veterans.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Markham–Unionville. I think the bigger question here is around the logistics of this piece of legislation. So if Bill 202, in fact, does go to committee and we try to make it a little bit better, we're going to be trying to address the fact that 12 times more people should access these supports, which, as I've already said, is a good first step. But if the corresponding funding is only six times as high, there's going to be a disconnect between the resources available to veterans who have the courage to actually reach out and ask for help. How does the government plan to address that inconsistency around resources available, the increased and improved access to supports?

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Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you, member, for the question. Yes, we need to support veterans who return to our country, and the Soldiers' Aid Commission will continue to provide up to \$2,000 each year in direct financial support for veterans and their families in financial need. As PA Roberts mentioned earlier during his remarks, this support has been the difference between a veteran putting a roof over their head or losing their family home.

It is important to note that the financial support the commission provides builds on the supports available to veterans through Veterans Affairs Canada, the Legion Poppy Fund and other funds in the country. In some cases, the commission may work with other organizations to share the cost of special items to ensure our veterans are getting the support they need.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We turn now to the member from Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I would like to acknowledge the member for Markham–Unionville for the passionate speech. It was really good to hear that.

The Soldiers' Aid Commission was created in 1915 to support Ontario veterans returning home after the First World War, and their families. It was later expanded to support those who had served in the Second World War and the Korean War. The last amendment to the soldiers' aid act was in the extension in the last expansion of the mandate, and that was about 50 years back, in 1970.

I believe all members of this House stand in agreement that support should be available for veterans regardless of where and when they served. My question to the member is a very simple one: Can you explain to the House the need for new legislation to ensure that all veterans—and I'll repeat the words, all veterans—can benefit from this unique program?

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you, member, for this great question. Why? Let me tell you. The Soldiers' Aid Commission was created in 1915, as you mentioned, to support Ontarian veterans returning home from the First World War, and their families. It was a long, long time ago, before you and I were born. It was later expanded to support those who had served in the Second World War and Korean War.

It is a sad reality that each passing year, the number of living veterans who served in those wars decreases, and while we will never forget their bravery and sacrifice, it is time we honour a new generation of servicemen and women. The Soldiers' Aid Commission is governed by the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act and reports directly to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. Changes to the commission—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you, sir.

Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to be able to say a few words in regard to this legislation that we will support as the official opposition, the New Democratic Party. As you know, the member for St. Catharines has been pushing to go in this direction. In fact, she had a similar-type bill to deal with some of these issues. I'm glad that the government has seen fit to try to make things a little bit easier for our veterans.

Now, I want to speak a little bit about things from a personal level, and then I want to go back to what was actually done to help veterans in the past, where we've gone and where we are at.

The unfortunate truth in Canada, as it is in many nations, is we asked young men—back then, mostly young men, but a lot of young women as well—to serve and to put their lives on the line for our country. If you look back at the Boer War, if you look back at the First World War, the Second World War, the Korean War and every conflict Canada has been involved with, there has never been a shortage of people who were saying, “Yes, I'm prepared to serve.” And it just seems to me, and I think it seems to all of us, that if somebody is prepared to put their life on the line in order to serve their country in whatever theatre of war or police action or UN mission or whatever it might be, we owe them the responsibility of having their backs. If something happens and they happen to get injured or they get PTSD or whatever it is, we have a responsibility to have their backs and to make sure that we're there for them when they need us, because certainly, they were there when we needed them. I think that's what we're trying to do here. All of us have spoken fairly well on that particular aspect of the bill. But I want to say, and I think most of us recognize, that was not always the case.

There was absolutely no support for veterans when they came back from the Boer War out of South Africa. Canada played a fairly important role in supporting Great Britain during the Boer War. A lot of people may not know that history, but those soldiers who came back went there and they fought valiantly. There was some great leadership on the part of our military of the day. We played a very

important role in supporting our British allies, as at that time we were the Dominion of Canada. But when those soldiers came back, they were just told, “Get off the train, get off the boat, and go and do whatever you’ve got to do.” They had to live with the scars of what they saw and what they did and what they had to experience while they were in that particular theatre of war.

The same thing happened in the First World War. All of us, I think, at one time or other have read books or seen documentaries in regard to the horrible conditions that the soldiers had to face during the First World War. It was the first truly mechanized war, and it was a horrible experience for anybody who was there—trench warfare, very primitive aircraft, what was going on in regard to the navy. The soldiers, the navy and the airmen and airwomen suffered greatly as a result of that particular experience. What was really galling was, when they came back, we had the parades and we built the cenotaphs, but when the soldier came to his country and said, “I’m not feeling well. I can’t sleep at night. I’ve got nightmares. I’ve got physical problems with the things that happened to me over there in regard to injury,” the government by and large dropped the ball. That’s why the soldiers’ commission was started. I think that the Ontario Legislature, at the time, understood that the federal government was not doing enough to assist those soldiers in reintegrating back into civilian life when they came back after the war.

You’d think we would have learned, because you see the history—because I know you’re a bit of a history buff as well, Speaker. When the soldiers came back after the First World War, they had to protest in the streets of Toronto, the streets of Ottawa and the streets across the world, in various cities and various countries, in order to be able to get their governments to pay attention to them. Again, when the governments of the world called for soldiers, they went, but when those soldiers called on their governments to assist them, the governments were not there.

Then we get to the Second World War. Many of us in this House are either children of vets, as I am, or grandchildren of vets. The only thing I will say is this: All of my uncles served—my uncle Lyle, my uncle Con, my uncle Stan, and others, my dad—but those men never talked about their experiences overseas. They never, never talked about what happened when they were there at the various battles.

Uncle Stan went from North Africa and came with the Canadian army as far as the invasions into Ortona. He was at Monte Cassino, and if we know the history of those battles—as you do, Mr. Speaker—they were a horrid affair. They were absolutely horrible. I don’t ever remember my uncle Stan or my uncle Conrad, who was at the Falaise Gap, or my uncle Lyle, who was wounded and decorated a number of times for actions above and beyond the call of duty kind of thing—I never heard any of those, including my dad, ever say, “Here’s what happened to us. Let me tell you about what really happened.” Quite frankly, they were trying to forget. Far too many of them turned to the bottle, because that’s the only thing the

government would give them in order to deal with the stress and to deal with the PTSD that they had from those particular experiences that they lived. I didn’t understand it as a young boy. My dad was an alcoholic when I was young. He quit drinking in my mid-twenties. He was sober for 29 years before he died. He was a wonderful man when he didn’t drink, but when he drank, he wasn’t so wonderful. I look back at what happened to my dad and my uncles and others, and they were the product of their generation. They were the product of their experiences.

What is really, really sad is that when the men and women came back from the Boer War, the First World War and the Second World War—and we’ll get to the others after—they were pretty well left on their own, with a bottle. It’s really tragic when you think about it. I’m a little bit emotional because all of us have probably lived this experience in some way or another. It doesn’t matter if you were born in Canada or born anywhere else, it was a world war and everybody went through it.

1650

What we’re trying to do here is recognize that we didn’t do enough and that we need to do more. Does this bill go far enough? No, it doesn’t. I don’t think any of us will say this fixes the problem, because there is a jurisdictional issue here. I’m not going to disagree with the government that Veterans Affairs shouldn’t have a role to play in this, but we shouldn’t also let it handcuff us in doing what we need to do for veterans today. Some of my colleagues have raised the issue of housing, PTSD, mental health services and others, of which some will be addressed by way of this legislation. But are we really doing enough?

There are things we can do as a province that the feds can’t do. We run the health care system. Health care is a provincial jurisdiction. Mental health and physical health is something that is essentially run by the province. We certainly wish the federal government would fund more of it. We know we went from 50% dollars when I first got here in 1990 to where we’re probably around 18% dollars from the federal government. But we can do things in our health care system that could assess vets, and it would be above and beyond what we’re doing with the soldiers’ commission. I suggest that when this bill goes to committee, we actually look at that as one of the things we can do.

I would be remiss if I didn’t tell a story from a number of vets I knew who were up on the James Bay coast. I used to represent—as you know, Mr. Speaker—the communities on James Bay and Hudson Bay. When I first got elected, I started going up there, and there were still quite a few vets around. On November 11, they used to rally together. They didn’t have a Legion there, but they would do a ceremony by the church in Moose Factory. Everybody would congregate—and there were a lot of vets. A number of them told me the story about how when they decided to join—nobody recruited them; they joined. The reason they joined was interesting. To me, it was a bit enlightening: “We signed a treaty with the King. We wanted to make sure that they lived up to our treaty, so we were going to live up to ours.” They packed themselves

and they found whatever way they had to to get out of the Far North of northern Ontario, which was hard to travel out of at the time because they didn't have the transportation system of today, which is still inadequate—but that's a whole other issue. They made their way to the recruiting centres and got sent overseas. They served valiantly in our Armed Forces.

The sad part is, like all other vets, when those First Nations vets got back to Canada—the boats landed in Montreal or Halifax—they were given a train ticket to the closest place they could go, but these guys had to pack it on canoe to get back home. There was no support for them to get back to their families. What was really great about this story was that they weren't bitter, which is really interesting. I was more bitter than they were, and I didn't live through the experience.

I was a peacetime soldier. I served in the Canadian Armed Forces in a peacetime army, which was a heck of a lot of fun, I've got to tell you. I got to shoot some pretty cool things, things that weren't moving, so I never had to do any of that stuff—7.5 howitzers; 50-cal and 25-cal; FN C1s; FN C2s; SMGs. I did all of that stuff; I had a great time—a couple of grenades in between—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No. Nobody ever shot back at me. I was a peacetime soldier. That's my point.

The interesting part was that these veterans, when they came back, were not bitter. The First Nations people have a certain humour about them. It's like, once you've been put in that position long enough, at one point you have to have humour just to make it through. But we owe it to those vets, as well.

My friend from Toronto Centre raised the issue of First Nations vets. We need to figure out in this legislation how we reach out to some of these vets, because there aren't too many of them left. There are some from later on—the Korean conflict and some of the United Nations conflict—but, by and large, the Second World War vets are fewer and fewer far between. We need to reach out and do what we can to support those vets for the sacrifice they gave to our country.

I would hope, when this bill goes to committee, that we actually do think about how we can address some of the shortcomings in this bill—and I don't think it's intentional. I don't think governments ever draft perfect bills, so I'm not going to express any negativity onto the government on that. But I think we really need to take a look at what that's all about.

I want to tell another story. It's a personal story from a gentleman I used to call my second father, Albert Vaillancourt. Albert owned a cottage two cottages away from where I am now, which is our house at Kamiskotia Lake. He had served during the Second World War, from 1939 to 1945. He went to England and he was—I don't know if he went to Dieppe; I never asked him. He might have gone to Dieppe, because he was there before. But certainly, D-Day landing and all the way through, he went through. The only time he would tell a story, it was about, "Oh, we went into this village and we found some wine.

Boy, did we have fun. We drank a bunch of wine," or "We found some eggs." He would tell those kinds of stories if he had had a couple of drinks. One day, I had the audacity and the stupidity, when he had had a couple of drinks, to ask him if he ever shot anybody. I was never so shaken in my life. At that point, I was 15 years old. That man, who I saw as a rock, a pillar of citizenship and everything else that evolves out of that, started to bawl like a baby. So I knew at that point something must have happened.

That's the story of our grandfathers. That's the story of our dads, our uncles, our neighbours and our friends, who went out and served in the various theatres of war and saw some pretty atrocious stuff. John Wayne was right on one thing. He was wrong in his politics, I would argue. But war is hell. He was right on that point. There's no way of glorifying what it is. That's one of the things I resent—that when they were doing war movies after the Second World War, they tried to glamorize war. Most of the boys my age—I was born in the mid-1950s—would go to these war pictures and say, "Oh, wow," "Bang, bang" and all that stuff. They tried to glamorize something that, quite frankly, shouldn't be glamorized.

I think we have an ability here, with this legislation, to make some changes that would allow us to get through how we can help vets and do for them what they did for us. If we can do that, we will have done our job when it comes to what this legislation can do.

I just want to end on the role that Veterans Affairs plays. Veterans Affairs, in some cases, does an excellent job. My dad was a client of Veterans Affairs because of the Second World War. They provided service to him while he was alive that was, quite frankly, very necessary for him to be able to do what it was that he had to do. When my dad passed away, unfortunately—I should say, unfortunately, my dad passed away, is what I wanted to say, like for all of us—my mother continued with some of those benefits afterwards. She didn't get his pension and all that; she got a little bit. But the big thing is, they provided support for her to live at home independently. They provided things like shovelling the driveway, doing some light housework. They had Sue—I forget her last name. She was her cleaner for years. She used to come in and help her clean and stuff. That allowed my mother to live with some dignity until she died in her own home. She never had to go to a long-term-care institution because Veterans Affairs provided some of the services that she needed in order to be able to live independently. Unfortunately, both my mom and dad died a little bit too young for my liking, but at least in their latter years, once Veterans Affairs kicked in, they were able to get some services that were pretty important for where they were in their life.

Does Veterans Affairs get it right all the time? Absolutely not. Look at the vets today who served in conflicts around Rwanda, Afghanistan and others. There are a number of vets who are beside themselves because they're being ignored by Veterans Affairs for things that should be done. I think, when this bill goes to committee, we need to look at that particular issue. What can we do in

Ontario that's within our jurisdiction—not point the finger at the federal government and say, “This is a federal responsibility of Veterans Affairs”? There are things that we can do in Ontario within our health care system and others that could possibly help make life a little bit easier for them and deal with some of the trauma and some of the issues that they've got to deal with as a result of their experiences while serving in the Armed Forces.

1700

I just say to all of us here that this is, I think, a step in the right direction. I think all of us want to take an opportunity to say thank you to all the vets who have served over the years, and to say that because of you, we live in a country that has the type of freedoms we have today. We have a strong system of democracy; a big part of that is that they help preserve that.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for this time to debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for questions. I recognize the member for Scarborough Centre.

Miss Christina Maria Mitas: Currently, about 4,000 service members leave the Canadian Armed Forces every year to live in Ontario, and the average age upon release of these members is 39. Currently, none of these members are eligible for support from the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

Will the member opposite commit to working with our government to pass this bill quickly, to ensure that we can address this unfortunate statistic and ensure that our province is there to support all of our veterans?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I certainly hope that the government, when we get to committee, deals with that issue effectively. I think that's what all of my colleagues have been saying on this side of the House. Every now and then, the government will introduce a bill—and I've said this before—where we're all on the same page. You're not going to vote against every bill the government introduces, and this is one we can support. I certainly hope you're signalling that the government is prepared to go to committee and do more than what's in this bill in order to address the issues that veterans face.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I want to thank the member from Timmins for putting a very personal lens on Bill 202.

When he was talking about our Indigenous veterans and how they are further marginalized and, really, off-grid when it comes to Veterans Affairs Canada, it reminded me of Buckam Singh. The former member, Jagmeet Singh, mentioned when he was here that Buckam Singh was denied nationality by this country and still went over and fought on behalf of Canada.

We will try, as we always do, to bring that lens to the committee work that I hope Bill 202 gets to.

To the member: How can we ensure that Bill 202 truly is an inclusive piece of legislation and is respectful of all of those veterans?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: In regard to the First Nations component: I think we need to reach out to First Nations, First Nations NGOs and other organizations, band councils etc., because unfortunately, in many of those communities, they won't even know this legislation exists. What we should be trying to do is to reach out and ask what we can do in order to assist those vets who are left who are from First Nations communities, who may live in the Far North, where there isn't any road and there isn't any Internet. We should find a way of reaching out and making sure that they learn of whatever it is that we pass here. More importantly, we should try to involve them in whatever we do in committee in order to make the legislation better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question goes to the member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you to the member opposite for his passionate presentation and his experience with his family's experience as a veteran—one of the veteran members of his family and his dad and what he went through.

Minister Smith and our government have been listening to the input of veterans, the current commissioners of the Soldiers' Aid Commission and others as this legislation was developed. The men and the women who serve on the commission have called for this expansion of eligibility for more than a decade, and I was proud to see Minister Smith act quickly to address this long-standing concern.

Would you agree that our expansion of eligibility and the matching expansion of funding will make a positive difference for veterans in your riding?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I think it's going to make a positive impact to anybody in Ontario, provided we also deal with some of the issues that we've all raised in this debate.

Yes, the eligibility has been changed so that more vets are able to qualify, and that's a step in the right direction—and to the minister, thank you, and to the member from St. Catharines, thank you for having raised this.

I think what we're saying here on this side of the House is, “Let's get this right.” Let's get it into committee and let's look at what we can do in order to try to address those things that are within our jurisdiction that we can do in order to make life easier for our vets.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I return now to the member from Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you as well to the member from Timmins. I really do appreciate the personal debates. I love these types of debates where we get to learn more about each other.

One of the comments that he had made earlier on was that we had the parades and we built the cenotaphs, and I started thinking about this bill. I don't mean this as an insult, but at some point, the government will change. We had a Liberal government for 15 years, and then they lost party status because so few of them were elected.

So I'm wondering, just because of all those years as a parliamentarian, what can we do when it gets to committee for this bill? I did the math on this. Apparently there are 232,000 veterans in Ontario right now. We have a budget

of \$1.5 million. I know not every single one will apply, but if they did, that gives just over \$6 each. So what can we do at committee to ensure that as government changes, the funding stays up to date? Do we have it tied to inflation? Do we set a goal amount? Do we set a reassessment amount? I'm just looking for insight.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I think what we need to do is have faith in the committee process. I think the government has to accept that the best work that this Legislature ever does is, quite frankly, in committee when the committees work properly. That means giving proper time in committee for the committee to develop what it is that they want done, but more importantly hearing from the public. It wouldn't be a bad idea to find a way to reach out to First Nations and other vets across Ontario to find out what we can be doing in order to assist them. So I would say, let's have faith in the committee process and allow this bill in committee in a way that allows the public to really get involved, the veterans and others, to tell us what they think is missing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further questions? The member for Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: The home of the greater Toronto airport, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Aris Babikian: It is becoming a trademark for you.

Mr. Deepak Anand: It is becoming a trademark.

I would like to thank the member. It was really touching, the story you shared with us, of your father.

Mr. Speaker, our government wants to make sure that we're there to support our veterans. That's why a modernized Soldiers' Aid Commission would provide employment support to veterans, so that they could put their skills to use here at home. I want to thank Minister Smith for acting quickly to address this long-standing concern, Mr. Speaker.

With recently released veterans with high rates of service in Afghanistan being likely to report difficulty adjusting to civilian life, does this member agree that access to employment support through a modernized Soldiers' Aid Commission will make a positive impact for veterans who are facing difficulty re-entering the workforce?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Absolutely. I think most of us would know vets who served in Afghanistan in our home communities. I've certainly met a number of them. One of the issues is that reintegration to get back into the civilian life.

Again, let's send this bill into committee. Let's figure out what's there that's good—and there is a lot that's in here that's okay—and figure out how we can strengthen the bill so that those who need the help can get the help they need. Let's not forget: They were prepared to put their lives down for us. We should have their backs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Another question?

Ms. Catherine Fife: To the member from Timmins: You shared a story of when veterans and soldiers came back to our communities, and what little supports there were for them to deal with mental health and addictions.

Aside from the intentions of Bill 202, where they will have access to some funding, what do you think the likelihood of access is, from a regional perspective and from a community resource perspective, and is that something that you think we can address at committee?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's a very, very good question because I think it comes back to what we've all been talking about. This is a bill that goes in the right direction, but it is a little bit short on responding to those specific issues that vets have to face. What do you do about reintegration? What do you do about PTSD? What do you do in regard to health issues? What do you do about long-term-care issues etc.?

I think we have an opportunity here to do the right thing, if we allow the committee to operate properly, so that vets can feed back in to what they think is missing and we can respond to them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for a quick question and a quick answer.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to the member opposite for sharing his story. As a grandson of a veteran myself—my grandfather fought in World War II, and he was a proud Canadian. He passed away in 2002. He always used to talk about his experience. Also, something that I got from him was public service, and I think that's why I came into politics.

1710

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): If you'd like an answer, you'd better pose a question.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: I would just say that I'm sure the member opposite will agree that this bill is going to be something that is going to help a lot of—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I return to the member from Timmins for a response, please.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I just want to say on behalf of all of us, thanks to your grandfather, every other grandfather and every other dad who went out and served in those wars, because without them, we wouldn't have the same style of life that we have today.

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

Mr. Smith from Bay of Quinte has moved second reading of Bill 202, An Act to continue the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We're looking for the committee that the bill is going to.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Social policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The committee on social policy—all in favour?

Interjection: Sure.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): That sounds like approval.

Orders of the day.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Point of order: I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Notwithstanding that the clock is past 4, I seek unanimous consent to make a statement with respect to standing order 9(f).

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The minister is seeking unanimous consent to make a statement. All in favour? Approved.

The government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: In accordance with that, the government will not be calling any business at 9 o'clock tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The minister has stated the House will not be calling business at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I am sure you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I am seeking unanimous consent to see that the time has now turned to 6 o'clock. Are you in favour? Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

FIREARMS CONTROL

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I move that, in the opinion of this House, to help reduce gun and gang violence in our cities, the government of Ontario urge the government of Canada to crack down on violent gun crimes, gun traffickers, and those who use firearms for violence and intimidation, by immediately strengthening Criminal Code bail provisions for all charges related to trafficking of firearms and violent firearm offences, and to explore mandatory minimum sentences for gun trafficking.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Ms. Hogarth has moved private member's notice of motion number 114. Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Mr. Speaker, I wish I could say that I'm pleased to be able to introduce this motion today. While I thank you for the opportunity to rise and speak, I'm sorry that this motion is even necessary. I regret to tell you and all my colleagues here in the House that a motion dealing with the skyrocketing number of shootings involving illegal guns in Ontario is not only necessary but becoming more urgent as every day passes.

Before I detail for you the depressing statistics which clearly indicate significant reforms to Canadian federal law are needed, please allow me to offer our thanks and best wishes to two important groups of people who are often part of these discussions.

The first is our police. Across Ontario in small towns and large cities, hundreds of thousands of police officers put their lives on the line every single day to protect us. Residents, taxpayers, families, business owners, every one

of us owes a debt of gratitude to our police officers and our police force whose diligence, competence and courage make this such a safe place to live, work and raise a family. When we talk about the issue of gun violence, our police officers are truly the front line, the thin blue line standing between law-abiding residents and the criminals who would do them harm. In my opinion, and in my heart, I know we can never say thank you enough to our police for the service they provide.

In addition, I'd like to acknowledge the contributions made to this debate by legal gun owners who respect the law and handle their firearms respectfully. We understand these are law-abiding citizens who have real, compelling reasons to own a firearm, maintain it legally and use it responsibly. I want to thank the many volunteers who organize and deliver hunter safety and gun ownership programs in every corner of this province. Your skills and knowledge are indispensable.

These two groups are not the focus of this motion I'm introducing today. This motion does not seek to criminalize legal gun owners who abide by the law. Instead, we are clearly focused on combatting crime committed with guns bought on the black market, illegally imported, illegally purchased and then illegally used.

The motion, if passed, would call upon Canada's federal government to strengthen bail provisions for those charged with gun crimes using illegal firearms and impose mandatory minimum sentences for individuals convicted of trafficking illegal weapons.

You may ask, why are these measures necessary? On September 8, my very own community in Etobicoke—Lakeshore was shaken by a heinous act of gun-related violence: 80 gunshots were fired. One man was hospitalized with serious injuries in a shooting that left so many gun casings that the police ran out of evidence tags. When I later visited the site of the shooting to speak with business owners and the local, very frustrated and concerned Lakeshore Village BIA, I was shocked to see a child care centre right across the street—right across from the shootings.

On October 1, a Toronto man was gunned down and killed standing right next to his one-month-old baby son.

Earlier this summer, in another tragic case, a young Brampton woman was murdered by her former boyfriend. At the time of the murder, the ex-boyfriend had just been granted bail after serving a mere six days in custody for being in possession of an illegal firearm. This was the young man's fourth arrest.

Mr. Speaker, in a very rare move, the chief of Peel Regional Police, Chief Duraiahappah, or Chief Nish as he's called, had the following to say, and I'd like to share it: "This represents a tragic outcome for a young person who carried a bright future.... In this incident, the sadness I feel for the victim and her family is mixed with frustration for a complete failure of our justice system to protect her....

"This was despite clear concerns regarding his risk to the victim, the community and the potential ... to reoffend.

"This resulted in another life being taken by a violent offender with another illegal firearm." He continued, "This unacceptable failure is becoming entirely too

familiar in our communities. Collectively we need to do better.”

Mr. Speaker, we can do better. I can fill the allotted time with terrible stories like these, as there is no shortage of bleak, horrible examples of shootings conducted with illegal firearms purchased and used by people who are not afraid to flout the law. They are very confident that they can disobey the law, and they do so with impunity, and then almost immediately they're back on the streets where they can buy more guns, commit more crimes and snuff out more lives.

1720

When it comes to initiatives which fall within the purview of the province of Ontario, I am confident in saying that our government has worked very hard to identify areas which need investment and communities which need support, and to deliver important resources. As the parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General, I am proud of our government's work to date, along with federal and local partners, to launch a multi-year, \$106-million Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy. With this plan, we are taking a comprehensive approach to public safety, addressing prevention, intervention and enforcement.

As part of our strategy, we're investing in initiatives which include the provincial gun-and-gang support unit, which supports investigations and prosecutions, and improves province-wide coordination; funding programs to support major investigations that involve multiple police services to target organized crime areas that fuel gang operations, such as drug, gun and human trafficking; and increasing funding for community policing programs. The government of Ontario also continues to invest in prevention programs for communities and youth at high risk of involvement in crime.

In August we announced that we will invest \$6 million and partner with police services across the province to expand the coverage of closed circuit television systems, a key tool in the fight against exactly the kind of guns, gangs and other criminal activity that we recently saw in my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Yet despite these considerable efforts, here in the city of Toronto we are seeing an alarming trend towards more shootings and more deaths. The numbers are rising consistently and persistently. In 2019, Toronto saw 494 shootings, the highest number on record; 284 people were injured and 44 of those people died. Already, only two thirds of the way through 2020, there have been 382 shootings, with 185 injuries, including 32 deaths. We must take steps to stop this trend.

When I refer to the alarming numbers of shootings taking place in 2020 or when we look at the number of illegal firearms which have been confiscated during the same period, it is important to consider these statistics in the context of COVID-19, because the number of shootings has been growing even while our border with the United States has been closed since March 15. Despite the fact that cross-border traffic has been virtually eliminated for seven months, we continue to see the number of crimes committed with illegal weapons increase.

Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, what will happen when the border opens again? There will be a flood of fresh new illegal weapons. They will show up on our streets, they will show up in our communities in the hands of violent criminals who have no regard at all for the rule of law and no respect for human life. They will be imported illegally, transported illegally, sold illegally, purchased illegally and used illegally. They will be used to kill.

But it doesn't have to be that way, Mr. Speaker. Canada's federal government has the opportunity now to do something to improve Ontario's situation in the future. Our federal government has the means and the resources necessary right now to restrict bail conditions on violent gun crime and to create mandatory minimum sentences for criminals trafficking these illegal guns. That is why today, we are calling upon them to address these issues now, before the border is reopened.

In fact, this issue is so fundamentally important to the safety and security of Ontario citizens that I am reaching out to my colleagues from across the floor to ask them to join me to petition the federal government to act on the request made in this motion. Surely we can all agree that taking action now to stem the flow of illegal weapons into Ontario, before they are smuggled, purchased and used to kill, is the right thing to do. Who can argue against that?

I want to share a quote I found: “Handguns are being used to kill innocent people in our communities. We need to do everything within our power to keep guns out of the hands of violent criminals. We must stop them at our borders, limit criminal access to guns in our communities, and prosecute vigorously everyone who chooses to break our laws.” This was stated in May 2008 by Bill Blair, who was at the time Toronto's chief of police and Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police president. He is now Canada's Minister of Public Safety. Well, Honourable Minister, it is actually in your hands to make your statement a reality.

Mr. Speaker, the motion I table today has received a number of supports from across the province. I would just like to share two in my time left.

From Bruce Chapman, president of the Police Association of Ontario: “Unacceptably, communities across Ontario continue to be exposed to significant risk by those who traffic guns and possess illegal firearms. Such callous practices pose serious concerns for public safety and for the safety of our police members who are dedicated to serving their communities. Given that, the Police Association of Ontario, which represents over 18,000 sworn and civilian municipal police personnel across the province, supports the motion put forward today.”

From Mark Tenaglia, civilian co-chair, community police liaison committee: “Our community has suffered far too long at the hands of criminals who have no respect for the law. It's time for our federal government to target criminals and not law-abiding citizens. The current federal government's safety mandate on firearms and crime is misguided and has failed our communities, allowing crime to flourish. This is why I support this motion.”

Gun trafficking and gun violence is not only a big-city concern. These illegal guns are making their way along highways and into our communities. When I ran as an MPP, people were not talking about the gun violence, but I had a town hall a few months ago with Premier Ford, with over 1,200 Etobians, and it was the first question I was asked—and I thank Tony for that question. While that call was taking place, coincidentally enough, a shooting took place in my riding.

Mr. Speaker, people are concerned. Mothers are burying their children. Innocent people are dying. Gun violence is not going away. It is in our backyards, and we need to do something about it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to speak in the House. I'd like to thank the member for putting the motion forward.

This motion speaks to gun violence, which is an epidemic in this province. Last year, in Toronto, 284 people were injured or killed as a result of gun violence. That's 284 tragedies that didn't need to happen. In 2020, we're nearly on track for that number again. In the past week alone, we've had tragedies in Oshawa and North York.

As gun violence continues unabated, our communities face ongoing grief, uncertainty and fear for their own safety and that of their loved ones. One death is too many, yet young people in our communities are dying in large numbers.

We are glad this motion has been put forward, as gun violence is an emergency that needs to be immediately addressed. Unfortunately, as gun violence continues to ravage our communities, it seems clear that this government is out of ideas. There is no evidence that mandatory minimum sentences have a significant deterrent effect, except in impaired driving cases. However, they add to court delays, disproportionately harm Black, brown and Indigenous people, leading to overrepresentation in the justice system, and may actually increase the likelihood of reoffending.

Additionally, courts across Canada are commonly striking down mandatory minimum sentences as unconstitutional for being "cruel and unusual." What's worse, everything this motion calls for is within federal and not provincial jurisdiction. There are plenty of things this government could do on their own that are within their jurisdiction, but instead, they are using their platform to criticize federal government policy.

Addressing gun violence doesn't start after a crime has been committed. At public meetings and in private conversations, local residents, community groups and business owners continue to express anguish and frustration at governments failing to address the root causes of gun violence. Successive governments have failed to invest in the programs and services our communities need to lift young people out of poverty and ensure they have the educational and employment opportunities needed to succeed. This government has cut mental health and youth

programming supports and cut funding for affordable housing.

1730

New Democrats take a different approach, one that communities support and one that works. We addressed this issue in our 2018 platform: "New Democrats believe our justice system should focus on keeping people safe, and on fighting crime by addressing the causes."

We also have offered potential solutions in our most recent policy document that calls for investment in Black, Indigenous and racialized people's lives, because we all deserve to feel safe.

"Fundamental change to community safety cannot be successful without centring the voices of communities most directly impacted and ensuring that alternative supports, as well as traditional supports, reflect their current and future needs. The province should also support municipalities in ensuring that vulnerable communities (like Toronto Community Housing residents, for example) are able to form their own safety plans. To that end, representatives must dedicate resources to engage in robust and comprehensive community consultation and create accountability mechanisms to community."

The province should "invest heavily in programs and supports that improve quality of life by considering and addressing the social determinants of health (social and economic factors that influence people's health) and use an anti-racist, anti-oppression framework," and "seek out community-driven, community-led solutions to community safety and well-being."

In addition to listening to and investing in communities, this government has other tools it could use, but refuses to. Toronto city council agreed that tighter gun control measures, including a handgun ban in Toronto, would help keep residents safe. Yet, while this motion delves into federal government jurisdiction, it fails to request that a handgun ban be implemented in Toronto, as requested by council. It begs the question: Is this government comfortable with people walking the streets of downtown Toronto carrying handguns?

Former Chief Mark Saunders told council during a debate on gun violence that 50% of firearms used for crimes were lawfully obtained in Canada and then typically resold. Why won't the Premier act?

While handgun sales are legislated federally, ammunition is a provincial responsibility. Instead of criticizing the federal government, the Premier could greatly restrict or ban the sale of handgun ammunition in Ontario, but refuses to do so. Why?

We are glad this motion has been put forward, as it provides an opportunity to discuss contrasting solutions to what is a clear problem in this province. On one hand, you have the Conservatives, who pass the buck; and on the other, the NDP, who have a clear plan to listen to communities and act immediately to put in place resilient solutions.

We will not oppose today's motion, as we know there's more to be done to reduce gun violence in Ontario communities. But we also urge this government to act, and

not just to criticize the federal government, whose policies they might not agree with.

If this government is out of ideas, we are happy to help. Our constituents rightly demand it.

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

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: I want to thank the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore for bringing the concerns raised in this motion to the attention of this House. I am in full support of this motion.

While it is true that much of what this motion intends to address falls under federal jurisdiction, the issues themselves affect our communities right here in Ontario, and often in my riding of Mississauga East–Cooksville. How can we stand by and say nothing while our constituents are in danger for their lives?

I would like to share some stats with the House. Of course, the data for 2020 is not yet available, but the numbers for gun-related crimes in Mississauga in 2019 speak for themselves. According to the Peel Regional Police 2019 Annual Report and 2019 five-year stats report on divisional data, there were 59 shooting victims, an 11.3% increase from 2018, and about 552 robberies with weapons and 709 investigated rounds discharged, which is something like a 40.7% increase from 2018. Also, according to data from Stats Canada, Peel's crime rate has risen every year from 2014 to 2018, from 2,993 to 3,334 per 100,000 people.

Speaker, it seems that almost every day we hear about gun-related crime in our neighbourhoods in Mississauga and the greater Toronto area. These numbers are appalling, and there is no denying that gun-related crime is on the rise. While we know that our brave officers are doing what they can, working with the province, regions and municipalities to improve policing and address the rise in gun crimes head-on, we must address the issue of firearms arriving in our province in the first place.

This motion seeks greater accountability from our federal partners to do what they can to speak to the problem from a federal perspective, because the federal government has the sole responsibility to regulate the crossing of goods at the Canadian-American border, and because the federal justice system is failing victims of gun crime by allowing these criminals back on the streets—because they set penalties, including bail, for firearm-related offences. It falls on our government to appeal to the federal government to address the real and present danger of guns and criminals involved in gun-related crimes on our streets.

With that, Speaker, I truly appreciate the great work that my colleague from Etobicoke–Lakeshore is doing by bringing attention to this much-needed debate. I appreciate all the great work you have done. Hopefully, with this motion, we will be able to bring the attention of our federal counterparts to this pressing issue.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to rise in the House today and speak to this bill. I believe that it's very timely.

I'm sure the member has heard me speak many times about the issue of gun violence. I represent a riding in Toronto similar to Etobicoke–Lakeshore, where gun violence is on the rise. It's appalling, really. When I look over the course of the last year and a half, three teenagers in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood have died due to gun violence and other forms of violence. I attended each of their services and have seen the enormous pain that this has caused the community—not just those who are directly affected, but their school community. I went to one of the graduations, and there was a seat left for that individual. It's just heartbreaking.

So the fact that you're bringing this to the attention of the House is important. But the direction is what I question, in terms of the focus. By the time we get to trading and trafficking and all of those issues—the roots of the problem are really what we need to be addressing. I have talked about this in the House many times. I have a bill, Bill 129, that looks at the public health issue. The city of Toronto has implemented that bill, in fact. They are doing work on it right now, because we have to really solve the root cause of those issues. If you talk to the emergency room doctors—and I've met with them—they tell you that that vector causes trauma that can actually transfer for generations.

Rather than looking at it from the perspective of what another level of government could and should be doing, our opportunity here in the province is to intervene before that bullet leaves or gets trafficked or is pointed at someone, and look at how we solve these community issues at their root and at their source. That's really my plea to this House and to this government—to make the investments where they are so desperately needed. We don't have to go to another government; we can make those investments ourselves in Ontario and make sure that issue is solved.

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I would also point out that gun violence is not just about crime and violence. There is a lot of harm caused to families and to individuals as a result of other forms of harm—suicide being a notable one; intimate partner violence is another area. Those issues are also at risk and at play here.

I agree: Gun violence is at a crisis point. When we look at the increase in Toronto alone, it's up 20%, in terms of the serious harm that is caused by this issue. Shootings are up year over year, and COVID-19 has not made it any easier at all. In fact, I've been talking to stakeholders in the community, and COVID-19 has probably made the gang-on-gang activity even worse, because of the restriction of the supply that is happening right now as a result of the borders being closed due to COVID-19.

In terms of the focus, absolutely, let's do what we can—that's the line that I agree with—to reduce gun violence. However, let's take a proactive approach in Ontario, with the government having a majority right now—being able to make those investments in preventive programs and in making gun violence end before it even begins.

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

Mrs. Nina Tangri: I want to thank the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for bringing this really important motion forward, and I will be supporting it.

Like many areas of this province, my community, Peel, has seen an increase in gun violence over the past several years. In 2014, there were 30 shooting occurrences, with 107 bullets fired and 15 persons injured. In 2018, 419 bullets were fired, with 45 people injured and 10 killed. Last year, 669 bullets were fired, with 54 injured and 12 losing their lives.

We know this trend is continuing. Just yesterday, a 28-year-old in Brampton was shot and killed. The investigation is ongoing, but police believe he was shot through the front door of his parents' home.

These are not just statistics; these are real people—mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters—lost to senseless acts of violence. The province knows this is an issue, and our government has taken actions to address this. Among them, in August 2018, we announced a \$25-million investment to crack down on bail offenders and equipped police with the tools they need to protect our communities.

In March 2019, we launched a plan to combat guns and gangs by investing in initiatives that support local crime prevention, enforcement and prosecution.

In January, I was pleased to welcome the Solicitor General to my riding of Mississauga–Streetsville to announce Peel's \$25.5-million share of Ontario's \$195-million commitment province-wide through the then-new Community Safety and Policing Grant program. This program provides police services with the necessary tools and resources to enable deployment of front-line officers where and when they need them the most, as well as to support police services as they implement public safety and community policing initiatives that focus on local or provincial priorities.

But the province cannot solve the entire issue on its own. What we see too often is that penalties for these actions are not strong enough. People who commit violent crime should not be able to get out on bail and have the opportunity to commit these crimes again.

What comes to mind for me, and as members on both sides have mentioned, is the tragedy in late July that occurred in Brampton. A 27-year-old woman was murdered by her ex-spouse. He was out on bail following gun-related charges—not for the first time, the second or third or even the fourth time. This was his fifth, and this should never have happened. There should be no way that this can happen.

To quote the chief of Peel Regional Police, Chief Nishan Duraiappah, "Our communities are continuing to suffer the consequences of violent crime committed with illegal firearms. It is the outcome of an equation which includes interim release of dangerous offenders with a demonstrated history of violence, combined with illegal firearm possession and use. This is a dangerous trend which inhibits our ability to mitigate community risk and prevent the tragic results we are seeing far too often."

I agree. As legislators, we must draw attention to these failures and fix them. This motion today brings attention to this issue and shows that our Legislature is committed to seeing it fixed, but there is only so much within our jurisdiction.

That's why we're calling on the federal government to continue working with us on this issue: to crack down on violent gun crimes and those who traffic weapons; to strengthen bail provisions for these reckless, dangerous offences; to explore mandatory minimum sentences for traffickers; and to keep Ontarians and Canadians safe.

Once again, I thank the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for bringing this legislation forward. I support it, and I encourage all members of this House to also support it.

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

Miss Christina Maria Mitas: I'd like to start by thanking the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore for bringing this very important motion forward. As a GTA member myself, I understand the very urgent need to take action on gun trafficking, especially as our city continues to be plagued by gun violence.

I had the opportunity to visit Canlish Road in my riding of Scarborough Centre while I was pregnant. I went at night and required a police escort. They didn't let me go without a police escort. I thought that was wild because people live in this area, and they don't have a police escort. We were walking around, residents were with us and they were pointing out corners and dark places that people could hide. They were saying, "Someone with a gun can hide here and get us," and "I feel unsafe walking down this pathway because someone can shoot me." These people live with that every day. Again, the police aren't there for them every day, and some people don't feel safe even if they are, and that's an issue.

If you look up Canlish Road, you get results that are horrifying:

—“Two in Hospital”;

—“Tyrone Tomlinson, 21, Was ‘Well Beloved’ But Snatched Away, Parents Say”;

—“Police Search for Suspects in Scarborough Shooting”;

—“Police Probe Overnight Shooting and Stabbing Incidents.”

This is heartbreaking and it's infuriating, but it's not unique to Scarborough, unfortunately. It's a growing problem in our city. We need to take action on this, and this motion does just that.

I'm also pleased with the specificity of this motion. The member is asking that our federal counterparts strengthen bail provisions and that they explore mandatory minimum sentencing for gun trafficking. I think this is a very important distinction. As the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane said, the violent offences themselves stem from a variety of causes. Mental health must be considered. The road to offences must be considered, and it must be addressed. I think an equity lens is very important here, and we've certainly done that by focusing on this.

This is why we're taking this tangible action and addressing traffickers and their sentencing specifically. These people are encouraging violence and urging people to engage in this behaviour. These are young people who could have another path and they're going down this because of these traffickers.

We must address this issue and hopefully use this as a jumping-off point to address this pressing issue holistically, as the member from Scarborough–Guildwood said. Along with the gun violence, we have a whole other slew of issues that are very detrimental to our society. Hopefully this is a starting point for us and our federal counterparts to really, tangibly tackle this issue. Hopefully this helps people who are engaging in this behaviour find a better path for both themselves and for the good of their communities.

I'm very pleased to support this motion today, and I hope all of you will join us.

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

Then we return to the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore for a two-minute submission.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: First, I'd like to thank my uncle Byron Lod, who has said he's watching today, who spoke to me this summer of his concern for the growing number of gun crimes and gun violence in his northern community. I believe this is a start to an important conversation and to action—and on a personal note, Uncle Byron, I hope you're feeling better soon.

I want to thank all my colleagues who have spoken so eloquently today on the urgent need for these reforms. I sympathize with every member, from every party, who has a story to tell about gun violence, loss and death in their ridings and among their constituents. I think it is fair to say

that everyone present here today has had their life touched by gun violence, and those guns were almost certainly illegal guns.

To reiterate, in 2019, Toronto saw 494 shootings, the highest number on record; 284 people were injured and 44 of those people died. Already, only two thirds of the way through 2020, there have been 382 shootings with 185 injuries, including 32 deaths.

This brings us again, Mr. Speaker, to the motion I tabled today, and the inarguable need for stricter bail conditions for gun crimes and mandatory minimum penalties for people trafficking illegal firearms. The federal government has the resources and the wherewithal to make these changes. They should start to work on these changes now, before the border between Canada and the United States reopens and illegal guns once again begin flooding into the province of Ontario.

I thank all of the members of this government for their support for this motion and once again appeal to the Liberal and the New Democratic Party colleagues for their support. We must take steps to stop this trend. We must implore Prime Minister Trudeau and his government to take action now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Ms. Hogarth has moved private member's notice of motion number 114. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): There being no further business in front of us this evening, the House stands adjourned until 10:15 tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1753.

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Rima Berns-McGown, Michael Coteau
Faisal Hassan, Logan Kanapathi
Jim McDonell, Christina Maria Mitas
Sam Oosterhoff, Kaleed Rasheed
Sara Singh, Donna Skelly
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Présidente: Catherine Fife
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Deepak Anand, Jill Andrew
Toby Barrett, Stephen Blais
Stan Cho, Stephen Crawford
Catherine Fife, France Gélinas
Christine Hogarth, Daryl Kramp
Michael Parsa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Deepak Anand
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Will Bouma
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Will Bouma, Stephen Crawford
John Fraser, Laura Mae Lindo
Gila Martow, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Dave Smith
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Présidente: Natalia Kusendova
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Aris Babikian, Jeff Burch
Amy Fee, Michael Gravelle
Joel Harden, Mike Harris
Christine Hogarth, Belinda C. Karahalios
Terence Kernaghan, Natalia Kusendova
Robin Martin
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

**Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight /
Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations
d'urgence**

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Tom Rakocevic
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
John Fraser, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Robin Martin
Sam Oosterhoff, Lindsey Park
Tom Rakocevic, Sara Singh
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell