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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 3 November 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 3 novembre 2020

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

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 November 2, 2020, on the motion for third 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. Mike Schreiner: I'm pleased to rise to speak on third reading of Bill 202, the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act. Speaker, I support this bill because it is far past time to update the act, which has remained unchanged since the 1970s—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I have to interrupt the member for Guelph and inquire how much time he plans to use for his remarks.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Three minutes, Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We'll give you three minutes. Thank you.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: For far too long, veterans groups have advocated for improvements to the commission in the financial support available to veterans under the program. We have seen reports that over 60% of the commission's budget has gone unspent in some years due to the lack of applicants who qualified for the program. Many of these supposedly "unqualified" applicants were just younger veterans who served more recently than the Korean War, so tragically, money went unspent while young veterans continued to face significant challenges. The expansion of the eligibility criteria to include veterans of all ages and their families is long overdue. These changes will allow for many more people who have courageously served our country to receive the support they need and they deserve.

I'm also happy to see the program's budget increase to \$1.3 million. These are desperately needed funds, and I know these changes will have a positive impact on people's lives. But we know that this isn't enough. We cannot stop with this piece of legislation. We know that

more needs to be done to provide mental health supports for veterans, and we know that more needs to be done to provide housing for veterans.

I was so sad to learn that in a survey in 2018, the city of Toronto said that 11% of the city's homeless population had reported having served in our military. It's unacceptable to have anyone in our society without a roof over their head, but it's especially unacceptable for women and men who have served our country and made sacrifices in serving our country to not have an affordable place to call home.

So it's our responsibility, Speaker, to honour our veterans' sacrifice and service, to ensure that they are enabled—and able—to live a dignified life after serving our country. With Remembrance Day coming up next week, this is a particularly timely piece of legislation. I look forward to voting for it and encouraging all members of this House to support this legislation and to support our veterans.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We now have an opportunity for five minutes of questions and responses. The first question: the member from Samia-Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the member opposite for his comments there. I just have one question that I would like to get on the record from our side, and also ask the opposition, the independent member. The Standing Committee on Social Policy heard from a number of presenters, including Together We Stand, about the importance of the commission recognizing the contribution of family members to recovery. Would the honourable member have some comments on that, please?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member opposite's question. I just want to say that, obviously, not only do we need to support veterans, but their families. I think we all know that when somebody serves their country, it's that individual making the sacrifice to serve, but it's also their family, Speaker. Ensuring that we have supports that not only include veterans but include their families is absolutely vital and critical.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to the member from Guelph for his comments this morning. My question is, yes, the government has announced \$1.3 million, but we know that 230,000 veterans are ineligible to receive these Soldiers' Aid Commission monies. I'm just wondering, if this money does run out halfway through, three quarters of the way through, and then we have veterans who are needing these funds to get a roof or

to get dental care or medical care, would you stand with myself and the opposition and help us convince the government to make sure the monies are there all the way through, even if the fund runs out?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question. I also appreciate the fact that you've talked about members of your family who have served. We certainly appreciate that.

Yes, as I said in my comments, I think eligibility criteria should include all veterans and, as I mentioned in my response to the last question, their family members. If the funds are insufficient, then absolutely we should increase those funds.

I think we have a moral obligation to stand up and support the veterans who have served our country. We should provide the funding to ensure that they're properly housed, that they have access to mental health supports and other social service supports to live the dignified life which they deserve.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you to the member for his presentation. Much of what is in this legislation is improving the lives of veterans and their families. One aspect is increasing the eligibility requirements for counselling and support for veterans and their family members. Would the member speak about the effects of that in his riding, please?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks. I appreciate the member's question. Expanding the eligibility criteria for services will absolutely benefit veterans in my riding and in ridings across Ontario.

0910

Speaker, before I run out of time, there's one thing I want to bring up today and put on the record: I've had a number of veterans in my riding reach out to me and say that they would like to see a highway or some sort of significant piece of infrastructure in Ontario dedicated to disabled veterans. They've pointed out to me that, currently, we don't have such a commemoration in place. The Highway 7 that's being proposed between Guelph and Kitchener-Waterloo is a piece of infrastructure that veterans in my riding have suggested be dedicated to commemorating disabled veterans, and I would hope that's a conversation that all of us in this House can have.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We really don't have time for another question and response.

Further debate? I recognize the member from Peterborough-Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've worn a kilt here in the chamber a number of times. Today, I'm wearing Black Watch to honour some of our veterans. Black Watch is the official tartan of three of our regiments: the Governor General's Foot Guards, the Canadian Grenadier Guards, and the Royal Highland Regiment, also known as Black Watch.

I'd like to talk a little bit at the beginning of the speech about some of the veterans from Peterborough who have served Canada but currently do not qualify for the

Soldiers' Aid Commission: Bill Steedman served overseas in Syria and Israel as a UN peacekeeper; Frank Schofield served in the Congo as a UN peacekeeper; John Rich, who I met through Toastmasters, served in Germany in the Canadian infantry; Bob Ware served in India and Pakistan; Ron Wardell served in Korea; Padre Frank Patrick, who is returning to Peterborough this month, has been serving in Cyprus; Lee Harrison served in Bosnia in the 1990s, and, after he returned to civilian life, he chose voluntarily to take a leave of absence from Peterborough Fire Services so that he could rejoin his former regiment and serve in Afghanistan after 9/11; and Lee-Anne Quinn. Lee-Anne is currently the honorary lieutenant governor of the Hasty Ps; she served as a major in the Armed Forces. Later this month, she'll receive the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers from the Governor General. She served in Afghanistan, Rwanda, Somalia and Bosnia.

I'd also like to give an honourable mention to Jim Burgess. Jim did not serve with the Canadian military. Jim served with the Royal Marine Commandos. He was on the shores of the Falkland Islands during the Falklands War.

When we think about veterans, typically we think of older people—people who are my age or older. I'd like to mention one other person who grew up in Peterborough, who doesn't get to be a veteran: Abby Cowbrough. Abby was killed in the summer of 2019 when her Sea King helicopter crashed. Abby went to high school with my daughters. She was 23.

The Soldiers' Aid Commission was the first of its kind in Canada and was created almost 105 years ago. It hasn't been updated since 1970, when we included the Korean War veterans in it. Speaker, I was born in 1970. This is a piece of legislation that has not been updated since I was born.

We've heard some of the statistics about it: Approximately 93% of veterans in Ontario currently do not qualify for the Soldiers' Aid Commission. That's about 230,000 people. We need to fix this. One of the things that this legislation will do is it will change the definition of "veteran," and it will put it in regulation instead of in legislation. Typically, we stand up here and we talk about how we need to remove regulations, how we need to get rid of some of that red tape. This is not red tape, Mr. Speaker; this is an intelligent use of regulations, because it means that we don't have to wait 50 years to do the right thing. As our "veteran" definition changes, we can change it in regulation, and it means that the Soldiers' Aid Commission will always be up to date. It means that it will be there to serve the veterans who have served our country, veterans like those I mentioned: Bill Steedman, Frank Schofield, John Rich, Bob Ware, Ron Wardell, Frank Patrick, Lee Harrison and Lee-Anne Quinn, among others.

We're increasing the funding from where it currently sits, at about \$250,000, to \$1.3 million this year, if passed, and eventually rising to \$1.5 million per year. What it will do is it will cover things like housing expenses for some of these veterans. If they're having trouble paying the rent, this is something that could be used to help with that. It will help cover some of the health care costs that they may

have that are not covered in other ways—dental, for example, something that should be covered for all veterans, personal care items.

And this one jumped out at me, Speaker: assistive devices and prosthetics. You're in a field of battle. You're in training. You're doing all of those things that you would do to serve us. Guns are being fired. Bombs are going off. Your hearing is affected by it. The Soldiers' Aid Commission would help cover the cost of things like hearing aids, then. And God forbid, if something happened and you lost a limb, the Soldiers' Aid Commission would help cover the cost of prosthetics. I can't imagine a time, I can't imagine a reason why we would not be covering something like that for someone who willingly stepped forward to make a positive difference, not only in Canada but in the entire world, who voluntarily put themselves in harm. We need to make sure that we're doing things that help these people.

We can't wait 50 more years to make these adjustments, and the changes that we're making in Bill 202 would mean we get to update that list as it's needed. We get to honour the veterans who have served our country and given up so much to make sure that we have what we have. We enjoy a quality of life in Ontario thanks to what the veterans have done for us. I think it's incumbent on all of us, when this comes to the third vote, to stand up and say, "I stand with the veterans. I stand with those who stood in front of danger to protect me."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The first question goes to the member from Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you for your words this morning. This is a bill that the NDP, or the official opposition, will be supporting. My question to the member from Peterborough is, as our member mentioned earlier, if the funds that have been allocated are not adequate, will your government up the funds to meet the needs of veterans in Ontario?

Mr. Dave Smith: I think that what you're seeing with this bill is that we're doing just that. Currently, there is only about \$250,000 that is allocated to it. Mind you, 93% of veterans do not qualify for this fund. We're increasing the funding to \$1.3 million, eventually getting to \$1.5 million. We're putting our money where our mouth is, and we're saying, "We support the veterans with this."

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

0920

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the member from Peterborough for his remarks. I did some reading on this and am very supportive of the Soldiers' Aid Commission. But in my reading, I found here that it said that very few veterans across Ontario or Legion members even know about the Soldiers' Aid Commission. I think I first heard of it probably about four years ago now. Can you expand upon how the government, if this legislation is passed, will communicate and expand knowledge of this great service?

Mr. Dave Smith: That's an excellent question, because you're absolutely right: Most people don't know about the Soldiers' Aid Commission and what it can do. That's

probably why it's not being used to its fullest capacity right now. We'll be embarking on an education plan with this to make sure that our veterans know about it and know that they can access it at any time for the things that they need help with.

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

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Peterborough–Kawartha. Just following up on the previous question and talking about funding, something I was curious about, I know that—I forget the exact stat—60% of the commission's funds currently aren't being spent every year. We're talking about raising it to \$1.3 million and eventually to \$1.5 million. If we do a good job communicating this and more money is needed, what is the plan to meet that goal? We've talked on both sides about the importance of supporting soldiers and veterans. What do we do when we need more money?

Mr. Dave Smith: As I said earlier, I think that we have already demonstrated that we have a commitment to our veterans. One of the things that Premier Ford has talked about is his love of veterans and of what they have done and the service that they have provided this country and this province. Currently, the fund is sitting at \$252,000 and, as the member said, it is not being fully accessed. We're increasing it to \$1.3 million if this bill is passed, and it will eventually grow to \$1.5 million. We're demonstrating that we recognize there are needs for our veterans, and we will be investing in our veterans as we move forward. This is a demonstrative way of showing that we believe our veterans are important and we're making the investment for our veterans.

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

Mr. Stan Cho: I appreciate that this government is putting its money where its mouth is, and a 700% increase to this fund is indicative of that. But I think there's something more important than the funds that we need to talk about here, Speaker, and that's the outcomes. It's not enough to remember our veterans on one day every single year. Could the member explain how this investment into our veterans is going to actually improve the outcomes for those who served so valiantly for our country?

Mr. Dave Smith: Mr. Speaker, imagine that you are a veteran. You have gone out and you've served your country. You've come back as a result of serving your country, and you're not able to do some of the things that you could do prior to serving. For example, you can't listen to birds chirping; you can't hear that. You're not able to successfully navigate your way downtown in that community that you went out to protect.

What the Soldiers' Aid Commission will do is it will provide opportunities, then, for those veterans. If you need hearing aids, we can provide them for you. If you're having trouble eating, because you have oral issues—if you can't eat well, you're not going to be well. You stood there and put yourself in danger to protect all of us. What we're saying is that we'll do what we can do to protect you.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to the member from Peterborough. My question is a little broader than just the Soldiers' Aid Commission. Last year, I stood in the House and put a bill on the table to expand the definition of a modern-day veteran. It was to make sure that it's not only our traditional-day veterans who are waiting to get into long-term care—because their numbers are dwindling, as you would be aware—but our modern-day veterans who are now in need of long-term care and hospital beds and mental health access. Will your government take the modern-day veteran definition that you have put in this legislation and expand it to any legislation in this House or in the provincial guidelines? Will you expand the definition of a veteran to be a modern-day veteran?

Mr. Dave Smith: I think that what we're seeing with this legislation is that we recognize there needs to be an expansion of what a veteran is in Ontario, and this bill does just that. By setting it in regulation, we can make the changes needed as it occurs, rather than having to wait 50 years to define who is a veteran in Ontario.

This legislation clearly shows we have a commitment to recognize everyone who has served our country, everyone who has stood in front of danger and said, "I will protect you." We are making sure that we're recognizing all of those individuals, and we will do it in perpetuity. We don't have to have another piece of legislation come through 50 years from now to do it.

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

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member from Peterborough—Kawartha for his remarks. I was particularly touched by the story of Abby, which is obviously very sad for such a young person to have lost their life in service to our country.

One of the things that I was most enamoured with in the legislation was the fact that it extends benefits to family members. I wondered if you could just talk a little bit about those provisions.

Mr. Dave Smith: As the member has said, we are extending the benefits to family members. We're all aware of post-traumatic stress disorder. We understand that our veterans, when they're experiencing some of these challenges overseas, when they're out there doing the things that they're doing to protect us, they're put in positions where they're exposed to things that normally we would not see and they have post-traumatic stress disorder.

Post-traumatic stress disorder can also affect the families, because you have a member of your family who has gone off, they've left, they're put in unknown danger, and when they come home—if they come home—they're not the same person most of the time. In this case, with Abby Cowbrough, absolutely her family will have experienced a great deal of grief. This new legislation would recognize that, and we could provide the support that that family needs as a result of it.

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

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you again to the member opposite for the passion in talking about the people you know personally. That's something I've seen here brought up time and time again, about the people that we know personally.

My question to the member opposite—I know you've talked about it in your debate as well, but if you could expand on how we get the information out to the people that we don't know, to the people that we heard about who are homeless, the people we heard about who have mental health problems and maybe have a difficult time focusing, or just don't have access to the Internet and that sort of thing. Can you expand more on that like you did in your debate?

Mr. Dave Smith: We will be embarking on a total education plan with this, and we can rely on a lot of our partners. One of the best partners that we have when we're talking about veterans is our Legions and the entire network that the Legions have. They reach out to different veterans; they work with different veterans. With this legislation, we'll have an opportunity, then, to work more closely with our Legions so that they can do some of that outreach for us.

We'll be working with municipalities on it to make sure that everybody who works with our marginalized communities knows about this and has an opportunity to introduce that to some of our veterans who have fallen on hard times and who are working through our social services departments.

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

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: It is always an honour to rise in this House and speak about members of our Armed Forces. I want to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 85 in Kapuskasing, the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 173 in Hearst, and the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 305 in Smooth Rock Falls.

I also want to thank the member from St. Catharines for her determination and her constant work to ensure that Ontario's military members receive the help they fully and truly deserve. Thank you, Jennie.

Speaker, I am pleased to speak about Bill 202 today for one particular reason: We need to stand up for and help those who have fought for and honoured Canada. This is especially true of Canadian Armed Forces veterans who have served in conflict zones and peacekeeping missions all over the world since the end of the Korean War. These veterans of as recent military operations as Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan are excluded and are routinely turned away. They don't receive aid when in an emergency situation like facing homelessness.

0930

Veteran homelessness is unacceptable, and not offering a helping hand to a veteran in need is adding insult to injury. In 2018, studies revealed that almost 1,000 veterans were in a situation of homelessness in Canada. The same

report indicated that veterans accounted for 13% of the homeless in Toronto.

On ne peut pas simplement nier de l'aide aux anciens combattants. Autrement dit, il n'y a pas des anciens combattants de deuxième classe. Que ce soit des anciens combattants de la Deuxième Guerre, de la Corée ou de l'Afghanistan, ils méritent tous notre gratitude et notre appui. Pour cette raison, je suis fier d'appuyer ce projet de loi.

Mais permettez-moi de revenir à la situation législative présente. Couramment, selon la Loi sur la Commission d'aide aux anciens combattants, la Commission d'aide aux anciens combattants offre de l'aide financière à ceux qui sont dans le besoin et qui ont servi dans les Forces armées canadiennes pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale ou la guerre de Corée; 93 % des anciens combattants n'ont pas accès à l'aide de la Commission d'aide, même si 67 ans ont déjà passé depuis la fin de la guerre en Corée. De plus, la législation date des années 1970 et la loi n'a jamais été mise à jour.

Let me remind all of the members in this House and everyone who is following us in their homes that last year, on November 19, to be more precise, the member from St. Catharines questioned the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services on this issue, on the outdated status of the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act. That day, the member for St. Catharines spoke about Phillip Kitchen from Kitchener, an Afghanistan vet who returned home suffering from PTSD and was living in a tent with his child. That's a dishonour to all veterans.

But I also want to remind the members from the government side that a change in legislation is not the end of this story. On the contrary, it is the beginning of a lot of hard work to ensure that the 93% of veterans who are currently excluded from the Soldiers' Aid Commission get access to the aid they need and deserve.

Je crois fortement que c'est notre devoir d'aider nos anciens combattants. On est à la veille du jour du Souvenir, monsieur le Président. J'aimerais bien que ce jour du Souvenir, on puisse assurer l'accès à l'aide pour ceux et celles anciens combattants qui en ont besoin.

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

M^{me} Gila Martow: Merci au membre de l'autre côté de la Chambre. Peut-être que vous pouvez expliquer à nous comment on peut aider les femmes qui sont les anciennes combattantes. Notre gouvernement entend que tous les membres ici veulent vraiment donner plus d'assistance. Ça fait longtemps qu'on n'a pas augmenté l'assistance pour les anciens combattants. Comment pouvons-nous aider les femmes, et les enfants des anciens combattants?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Merci pour la question. Écoute, je pense que, que ce soit une femme ou un homme, quand ça vient aux combattants, ils ont tous besoin de la même aide. Quand les familles souffrent, quand les combattants souffrent, je crois qu'on a une responsabilité de le faire. Ma question serait, pourquoi a-t-on attendu neuf mois pour amener un projet de loi qui peut aider tant de familles ou tant de vétérans? Écoute, c'est certain que, les femmes, il

faut les aider, mais je crois qu'on ne devrait pas juste arrêter là. Je pense qu'il faut prendre une loupe puis aider tous les combattants, que ce soient des hommes ou des femmes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The next question goes to the member from Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: For the last seven months, I've been part of a group that has been delivering meals to vulnerable residents, to seniors and to people experiencing homelessness. During these seven months—one of the people who I've met lives under a bridge. He's lived under the bridge for about four years, and he is a veteran. He served in Afghanistan. He is a graduate of the Royal Military College. He has a .38 slug in his leg from a training accident when he was a soldier.

The honourable member from Mushkegowuk mentioned that passing the legislation is just one step, that we need to be able to find these people and get them the aid they deserve. What should the government be doing? What would that next step look like?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Thank you to my colleague for asking this question. All the help we can give to veterans, big or small, should be taken. We should reach out to Legions and ask for their help. But we as a government have a responsibility to the people who made sure that our lives—how we benefit is from veterans. That's why it's so important that we surround veterans, the Legions and give them as much help as we can.

Homelessness for veterans should not exist. There need to be homes and places so that we can address the PTSD. So, yes, reach out to the Legions, reach out to the organizations that can help and give as much funding as we can.

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

M^{me} Goldie Ghamari: Merci beaucoup. J'ai écouté avec plaisir.

I just had a few questions and comments for you. Our government knows that many veterans face mental health challenges or physical disabilities sustained during their service when they return home and as they transition to civilian life. As we seek to pass this legislation, we really need to ensure that the supports we're providing to veterans through the Soldiers' Aid Commission would work alongside other support programs that these veterans may be accessing, such as social assistance. That's why I'm glad that Minister Smith has reaffirmed that the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services intends to exempt this funding through regulation for the purposes of social assistance.

I just wanted to know if the member opposite would agree that this exemption is a positive aspect of the support to veterans that the Soldiers' Aid Commission will provide.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Thank you for the question. I would say to the member across, it should be legislation, not regulation.

I think it comes back a little bit to what my colleague from St. Catharines has said. We need to insert this definition in all of the legislation where veterans are affected,

and we need to make sure that our veterans get the help they need.

Ils méritent l'aide qu'ils méritent. Ils ont sacrifié—il y en a qui ont sacrifié leur vie, il y en a qui ont sacrifié des membres, il y en a qui ont sacrifié leur famille. Leurs familles ont été tellement impactées. C'est pour ça que ce n'est pas une réglementation dont on a besoin. Il faut avoir du langage dans la législation pour faire certain qu'ils sont protégés pour l'avenir.

0940

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

M. Gilles Bisson: J'aimerais remercier le membre de Mushkegowuk—Baie James pour ses commentaires.

Comme tu le sais, on a souffert à la ville de Hearst dans le comté de Timmins-Baie James avec ce qui est arrivé au soldat Bouthillier, qui est mort en Afghanistan. Lui, l'histoire qui est intéressante—il s'était fait volontaire pour aller, puis sa première mission, il est mort.

Ma question pour toi est celle-ci : dans le cas de quelque chose comme ça qui est arrivé, est-ce qu'on aurait besoin d'avoir regardé à donner ces bénéfices aux survivants, si c'est nécessaire, pour être capable d'aider les familles quand ça vient à la perte de la vie d'un membre de leur famille?

M. Guy Bourgouin: C'est une très bonne question, à mon collègue de Timmins. Quand on pense aux pertes, c'est la perte ultime quand on perd un être cher en guerre, ou dans n'importe quelle situation. Mais sur le sujet dont on parle, je pense que c'est le sacrifice ultime qu'un individu va faire. Oui, je crois que ce serait important que ces bénéfices-là ou l'argent soient remis aux successeurs, à sa famille. Il ne faut pas oublier que ces familles-là sont mises dans une situation de crise, puis elles ont vécu beaucoup de peine, et que le peu d'argent que la succession peut leur amener peut, peut-être, les aider à l'enterrer ou encore aider à passer à travers les difficultés auxquelles la famille peut faire face.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: During the consultation process associated with this legislation, we heard from veterans, across all sectors of veterans. But we heard particularly a request to extend the benefits to families, because in many cases, families, when a member is serving, are left behind to maintain a household and other aspects associated with daily living. Would the member please speak to the effect of, in his riding, the extension of benefits to families?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Merci pour la question. Dans une situation comme j'ai dit, comme mon collègue avant m'avait demandé aussi, c'est que les familles vivent des difficultés extrêmes quand elles perdent un être cher, puis on ne le souhaite à personne. Mais ces bénéfices qui sont « étendus », si je peux utiliser le terme anglophone, peuvent aider les familles à passer à travers encore des situations de crise ou de difficulté. Veut veut pas, quand on a une personne qui a été diagnostiquée avec le PTSD puis que la famille passe à travers, je pense que toute la famille a besoin de l'aide. C'est pour ça que si plus d'aide

peut être donnée à la famille ou aux personnes qui ont servi dans la guerre, mieux ça peut être pour tous les partis concernés.

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

Mr. Jamie West: Just very briefly, the member spoke eloquently in French. I'm just wondering if he has any questions or anything he wants to elaborate on in terms of French services for veterans.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Merci à mon collègue. C'est sûr et certain qu'on voit que, dans plusieurs régions éloignées à travers la province, des fois les services francophones ne sont pas tout le temps à la hauteur des services anglophones. Puis je crois que c'est un droit constitutionnel que les personnes qui sont unilingues francophones devraient avoir les mêmes services en français. C'est une bonne question, puis c'est très important pour les soldats francophones.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate? I turn to the member from Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you, Speaker. Just give me a moment. I was expecting the government to put somebody up. I'll just pull my notes up.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 202. This is something, as many of us have talked about, that is near and dear to our hearts on both sides of the aisle, and it's good to debate something where we've come together so well.

All of us in the chamber and across Ontario are wearing poppies and supporting poppies and we're all thinking about Remembrance Day. I know Remembrance Day has been different due to COVID. Last night I was talking to some of my colleagues about how the services will happen in their area and how they, honestly, have already happened in Sudbury. We did ours virtually.

When I attended our service—we filmed it last month, actually, to edit, and it's going to be played on November 11 in the city. I've been attending since I was in Cubs, and it has been a large event at the Sudbury arena, which is a large arena for my community, with Cubs and members of all the different—cadets, different branches of military service that come out.

I was concerned with this small event that we had at Memorial Park with just a limited amount of people that it wouldn't be the same, but I want to share with you, Speaker, and my colleagues in the Legislature that it was incredibly personal. I don't know what it was about it. I don't know if it's because we're in a pandemic and we're trying to come together or what it was about this Remembrance Day ceremony in my community of Sudbury, but it just felt so personal to me. I think being able to see everybody, connecting with the veterans—and we're doing this for veterans. To bring us back into the debate, we're doing this for veterans. When you see many of our veterans, with difficulty walking or standing, but proudly standing and holding the flags and marching together, you get a sense of pride and how critical it is to update this.

Just while I'm talking about poppies that we all have on our chests, I think it's important that we encourage our

communities to make the donations, to reach out to support our Legions. It's what we do every year. I know there's a concern in my community, and I'm sure it's the same in many other communities, that some of these older veterans, because they're vulnerable, aren't able to volunteer.

I know many of the younger—not quite veterans yet, but I know many of the younger military people are volunteering for those services and younger people are assisting, and I would encourage my colleagues, if you're able—what we did is, we had the poppies in our office. We have enough space where we could put them out in our office so people can get them socially distanced without worrying about grabbing a whole bunch at the same time.

I think this legislation—I've been here for most of the debate throughout the days and I'm amazed how it touches all of us, how personal it is for so many of us to have these conversations. Both sets of my grandparents were with the Royal Canadian Air Force. It's where my parents met. My dad served as well. I often joke that my dad would jump out of perfectly good airplanes.

There's a funny story about my dad. He had this nickname—I want to say Ice Man, but that wasn't quite it. People felt like he had ice in his veins because the day that he jumped, he was never nervous. I'm blowing his cover, but, honestly, this is more than 50 years ago—my dad threw up all the night before. He was so worried about what would happen and just had nothing left in his stomach the day of.

But it's where my parents met. It's where my parents fell in love and dated, and it's the reason that—ultimately, if they hadn't met there and decided that my father was going to pursue a career in mining at Inco back in the 1970s, I would never have been born in Sudbury and perhaps would never be here, and so it's close to me.

My stepfather, Bill—his dad, William, served as well. I had a placement at SickKids when I was in college and I stayed with his mother, Vi. I stayed with Vi and I heard stories about how William and Vi got married before he left for World War II, and how she was 17 years old and they got married because they were in love and didn't know if he'd come back, and how she spent World War II living with his parents because she was part of his family now.

Interruption.

Mr. Jamie West: That's not me, I don't think.

0950

The connection that my stepfather has with the Legion, because we're talking about Legions and veterans—my stepfather, Bill, regularly attends Royal Canadian Legion Branch 76. He sits at what's known as the “BS table.” It's a large table where they play cards and they tell stories, and it's a group of friends. I knew it was a place he liked to go, it was a place he liked to hang out. Friends from work were there and they had that connection. He likes to support the Legion, so he would rather spend his money there than somewhere else, but I didn't realize how important it was in terms of support until last summer when my mom had a stroke. My mom had a stroke in June. I got

a weird text that just said, “I think I stroke,” but she was safely in the hospital by then. She just was trying to let me know there was an issue before my dad was able to call.

That November, when I went to the Legion to talk to the veterans and help serve beer and that sort of thing, every single person at the table told me how my dad would come in just once for about 15 minutes to make small talk and say, “I have to go home and take care of my wife.” It's that support that they provide. There's so much other support, but it's that personal connection. I know that him going there and just seeing his friends, to be able to refresh and de-stress—when your spouse can't speak anymore, when you're worried, how important that is, to just have a shoulder to lean on.

We all have these different connections when it comes to veterans, and they're all personal. The reason I'm talking about this and I'm trying to make it personal is so that when we come together—and we are, over this bill—we talk about and we think about the people we care about, and we think about how to make this bill as good as possible.

When I think of the military—it's weird; I always think of I was going to say “John,” but he's really Greater Sudbury Police Sergeant John Valtonen. He is a detective. I first met him at Laurentian University. He was a cadet, and he was in the reserves. He has always been proud of his background with our Armed Forces. It's the cornerstone of who he is. He wears it on his sleeve, wears it on his heart like our poppies.

John was with the OPP for 15 years. He was an active detective sergeant. He just recently made sergeant for the Greater Sudbury Police Services. I'm talking about John because even though John is the first thing I think of when I think of Canada's military, I also think of John in terms of Laurentian University; I think of John as a community member when we were Beavers leaders together, and those sorts of connections. I want to remind people that sometimes those are connections you don't know, because a lot of veterans, they don't wear it on their sleeve. You don't see it in them if you don't have that personal connection.

I talked earlier about the Remembrance Day ceremony in Sudbury. Eddie Thompson was there, and even though I know Eddie Thompson is a veteran, Eddie Thompson was a convertor aisle supervisor at the Copper Cliff smelter, so when I see Eddie, I see him not just as a soldier, not just as a veteran—and Eddie, by the way, is one of those soldiers I was telling you about earlier who has a difficult time standing with his back and walks slowly. But I see that pride in him as a soldier and I see that when he came back to work in our community, Eddie had to find work. There are stats in this bill that we talk about with veterans coming back and having a difficult time finding employment, and how important that is. Eddie was a pretty good supervisor and he had a nice career, but we know there are a lot of soldiers who don't.

I also think of Shane Cusack. Shane is a friend of mine. He works in transportation. Shane is one of those people who we talked about on both sides of the House. He's

carrying some weight from having served. Shane was—I forget the exact title, but he was the person who would go out if there was a bomb. He was—I apologize, Shane—some sort of engineer, but basically his job was to diffuse bombs. He is very proud of that and he is proud of what he has done, but he’s also mourning the loss of many soldiers that he knew: from the stress, or from having died in battle, or from not being able to deal with the stress and dying after they retired through suicide.

Will Morin is another person I think of. Will is somebody who, even though he is this great Indigenous leader in our community, I always remember him as one of my sister’s friends in high school. He simply cares about people.

Will is an Indigenous leader and he was an Indigenous soldier. That’s something I think we don’t talk about enough, the fact that Indigenous people served with us. They answered the call to serve. I was doing research on this. They were actually volunteering to serve our country before they were able to vote in our country. We owe them a debt of gratitude, and we have to do more than just be proud and sit on our laurels on what we did about allowing them to vote. We have to really provide services.

The last one I’ll talk about is Gordon Nichols. The only reason I want to talk about Gordon—Gordon is American, so he won’t be affected by this—is Gordon was a marine. What stands out to me with Gordon is that when Colin Kaepernick was taking a knee for Black Lives Matter—and you have to put yourself back a couple years to recognize this, because now Black Lives Matter has been more of a conversation, but when he first took a knee, it was a real standoff. People were very divided, especially in the States, where they’re overtly patriotic. I remember Gordon saying, “Stop telling me how the military would feel. Stop telling me how veterans would feel. Unless you serve, you don’t get to say it.” He wasn’t saying that people were right or wrong; he was just sick and tired of people who hadn’t served saying that veterans would be upset or angry or ashamed.

That’s something that stuck in my head, because with this legislation, Bill 202, I’m worried that because I haven’t served, I’m missing stuff that’s not here. I’m hopeful we got it right, but I haven’t served personally, and I want to make sure we get it as right as possible, just like all members here do.

I want to recognize the members of the Legislature who I know have served. I apologize if I miss—any time you mention someone, you’re going to get somebody missing. The member from Whitby, yesterday, talked very proudly about being a member of his Legion. The member from Timmins has served. I want to talk about the member from St. Catharines as well.

I like to brag about my seatmate. Because of COVID, I’m in the corner office. I normally sit just one chair ahead. The member from St. Catharines sits beside me outside of COVID. As you all know, you get to know your seatmate fairly well. I know the pride she takes in her position as the official opposition’s critic for veterans, Legions and military affairs. We joke around about calling each other “Maverick” and “Goose” while we’re sitting here.

I know the passion she has. I know how proud she is of her son. Her son is actively serving in the Canadian Forces right now. She doesn’t brag about him enough, I feel. I know she’s mentioned it during this bill because it’s relevant, but I think that if I had a family member actively serving, I would bring it up in every conversation I had. So I want to thank your son for his service. A petty officer first class in the Royal Canadian Navy is nothing to sneeze at, and you should be very proud—as I know you are.

She speaks with great passion about our military, about our veterans, about the importance of the Legions. She brings it forward all the time. When I go to my Legions, I talk about her. Last year, the Legions were selling maple syrup and I brought it back for her from our Legion, just because of the connection. I know maple syrup is good wherever you have it, but I thought she’d enjoy it more, having it as a fundraiser for our local Legion.

When she spoke yesterday—I went to Hansard and took a quote out of it. This, I think, is about the passion. It’s out of context, so I want people to understand, anyone who’s watching this or reading this, that this is about working together. It isn’t a negative thing. This is the quote I took from Maverick:

“It is important to note that I will endeavour to continue to have a watchful eye on the proceedings. I will stand vigilantly to ensure this legislation is passed in a way that creates substantive change that is fair and just. Especially in these tumultuous times, it is more important than ever that we provide support for the most vulnerable in our community and that we do it quickly. It is vital that we get the emergency support in the hands of veterans that need it as soon as possible.”

I want to thank her for saying that, because it’s really why we’re here. It’s about looking at this with a critical eye and getting it right, getting it as perfect as we can.

1000

It is unbelievable to me—I can understand why a lot of veterans don’t know that this exists. The legislation was created in the 1960s. The previous iteration of the program left 60% of the commission’s annual budget remaining unspent, year after year—60%. I mean, it’s old. Who it covered, basically, they’re getting old and many of them aren’t here anymore.

Obviously, we’re supporting this bill. I think we’re all supporting it. I’ve heard members from all parties talk about supporting it. But we really need to get it right. We have to make sure that it doesn’t sit gathering dust for another 60 years, because we want to get it right.

There are a lot of ways that I think it is getting it right. I want to congratulate the government—I can’t remember if it went to committee, but if it was approved during committee, I think they did a lot of things well. I think extending it to family is one of those things that resonates with me. I mentioned earlier being cautious because I don’t have personal experience, but I have family experience.

When I mentioned living with Vi Moore previously, in Toronto, when I had a placement at SickKids, it was right after her husband had died. Vi is from a previous

generation, where her husband was the breadwinner, and so extending benefits to family becomes really important. The reason so many of our soldiers—male, female—are successful is because of the support they have from family. It's family that helps them be successful.

I thought it was interesting that the previous version that we're updating of the Soldiers' Aid Commission expired just for people who had served in the Korean War or previously. Honestly, I couldn't remember when the Korean War was. I knew it was some time in the 1950s or 1960s, but I couldn't remember. I was born in the 1970s. I looked it up: 1950 to 1953. I apologize for anybody who was offended that I didn't know. But to put things in perspective, I couldn't remember when M*A*S*H ended, and M*A*S*H was a show about the Korean War, so I looked that up too, just because I was curious. I ended up in one of those Wikipedia rabbit holes. M*A*S*H ended in 1983, 30 years after the Korean War ended. But even then, if this legislation had come out at the end of M*A*S*H, it would still be 37 years old. That's a long time. Every year we go out and we talk about how important our military is and how we honour them, and we haven't dusted this off.

I want to congratulate everyone involved. I know the member from St. Catharines urged this to happen, and I know the government took it on, and I know we're going to be urging the government to make sure that it gets to third reading, that it gets assent and becomes law. It's been a very long time.

If you look at who it covered previously: people from World War I—the very last veteran has been laid to rest. The average age of a World War II veteran right now is 94 years old. The average age of a Korean War veteran is 87 years old. What that calculates with numbers is that about 93% of the current veterans couldn't access the current funding. When you think about it, the member from Windsor–Tecumseh said yesterday that the face of a veteran is different. I talked about Eddie Thompson, and many of us, that's who we think about for a veteran: with grey hair or retired. But the member for Windsor–Tecumseh talked about, if you enlist when you're 19, you can retire after 20 years. Someone looking like me would be an old veteran, because I would have been retired. At my age now, I'd be retired for 10 years as a veteran. We need to think about how that envelops it.

I'm going to run out of time, Speaker. I had a lot more to say. The final thing I just want to squeeze in is just the importance of mental health. We talked about it on both sides of the House, but I just want to underscore, with mental health, one of the concerns I have with the cap of \$2,000 is that perhaps \$2,000 might not be enough for mental health. We might want to consider doing something specific for mental health for soldiers and for military.

My time is about 10 seconds, Speaker, so I'm going to yield.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We do have about 10 minutes of questions before we head to our member statements.

I recognize the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member from Sudbury for his speech and his comments, personal reflection, with his family members involved with the military and also with the Legion.

He was also, in wrapping up his speech, talking about mental health, and earlier on he talked about suicide. Research from Veterans Affairs Canada shows that male veterans have a 1.4-times-greater risk of dying by suicide than their civilian counterparts, and for female veterans it's 1.9 times greater. So I would ask the member for his thoughts on adding mental health supports as one of the services accessible through the Soldiers' Aid Commission and his feelings about that.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka for his question. Mental health is one of the things that I'm very passionate about. You talked about the rates of suicide: 1.4 times the rate for males, 1.9 times the rate for females. It's a terrible statistic. I do think it's important to have the mental health, and that's why at the end of the debate I was talking about how we might even need legislation specific to combat this. I think that the aid is going to be there, but \$2,000 won't get you very far. It will help, but it's not going to help you long-term. It won't get you very far. I think that there are things that we can do that would help specifically in this area—and maybe they exist already, but I think we can improve on them. But I do agree that mental health is very, very important in this regard, and it's absolutely the least we can do for people who have served.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to commend the member from Sudbury for his great debate on this bill.

As he talked about, he knows a lot of veterans in his community. I want to put a shout-out to the veterans in my community. Right now, because of COVID, they're not able to have their coffee club. They would meet every Wednesday morning, weekly, with colleagues in London and surrounding area at a coffee shop, a little bakery. Unfortunately, they're not able to congregate because of COVID. I've been there many times to have coffee with them, and I just want to say hello to them and appreciate all that they've done for us, like all veterans.

My question to the member is: The funding for veterans under the commission used to be \$253,000. It has gone to \$1.5 million.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pose your question, please.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes. I wondered if you could tell us who the government consulted to come up with that amount, the \$1.5 million.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to our whip, the member from London–Fanshawe. I don't know who they consulted on that number. I talked in the debate, actually, about being worried that—we perhaps need to reach out to more people who had served to get that first-hand knowledge, to get the information.

Earlier, I asked questions to the members opposite: What happens if we use up this amount? We know that 93% of the veterans right now aren't applicable because they were after the Korean War. What happens if we hit that cap level of \$1.5 million?

I think we're united in improving this; we just have to make sure we get it right. The best way to get it right, if I've learned anything over the years, is to talk to the people involved in that work, talk to the people who are dealing with it regularly.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member from Sudbury for his comments today and for sharing his family's stories. I also want to thank the member from St. Catharines for pushing this forward and making this an issue in the Legislature. So thank you to both.

I'm very concerned about this \$2,000 cap per year for veterans. I mentioned earlier that for the last seven months, I've been serving meals to people experiencing homelessness, and one of them is a veteran who has been living under a bridge for four years. I'm thinking \$2,000 is not going to get him out from under that bridge. What should we be pushing the government to do, or what should the government be doing to actually help people? Because the statistics show that 13% of people experiencing homelessness in Toronto are veterans.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you as well to the member from Spadina-Fort York. The \$2,000-a-year cap is disconcerting, especially when you talk of homeless veterans in Toronto. I think, if you're lucky, that is going to get you a month and a half of rent; maybe if you're far on the outskirts, two months. I know in my riding, finding rent for less than \$900, maybe \$800, is pretty tough, so I can imagine in Toronto. And then all the other services that are required as well.

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When we know—I always believe in fact-based, data-driven decision-making. We know there are 13% of veterans who are homeless. That's a large percentage. And \$2,000 isn't going to help. On top of that, the Conservative government has made cuts to OW, to ODSP and other services. We have to make sure that we have those services as well.

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

Mrs. Gila Martow: Thank you to the member opposite for his wonderful talk and support from his community and for our veterans.

What I wanted to ask him: The Soldiers' Aid Commission, we've increased funding vastly, I believe 700%, so we know that it's not just a funding issue, because veterans are not fully aware of the program. Veterans and their families and their friends are not even aware that this funding exists.

What I would ask the member opposite is, what does he propose or have suggestions in his riding and all of our ridings across the province—how can we promote this, how can we get the word out for our veterans? It shouldn't

be so hard, in the day of social media and things like that, but it seems to be a bit of a struggle to have that communication, so I'd like to hear his suggestions.

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank the member for Thornhill. The funding has come up; it's going to help a lot more people, the—I was going to say the cap. Basically, removing that cap of Korea and earlier battles is really going to help.

Getting the word out: I think we need to talk to Legions and we need to talk to veterans about what they think is the best way. I was talking about people who I think of when it comes to service and people who I forget often—and one of them is named Chris. We volunteer together at the Sudbury arena, holding the doors open for people and things like that. I couldn't think of Chris's last name and I tried looking him up on Facebook, and he's not on Facebook. So my gut feeling would be, "Oh, we'll put it on the Net," but perhaps veterans don't go on the Net, or maybe there are specific places where veterans go to.

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

M. Guy Bourgouin: Merci de ton allocution, à mon collègue de Sudbury. Ma question serait—écoute, tu as parlé de la santé mentale, ce qui était super important, et qu'on semble des fois oublier l'impact que ça peut avoir sur les familles. Mais j'aimerais entendre aussi quoi d'autre qu'on devrait faire. Quoi d'autre pourrait être fait pour aider les vétérans et leurs familles quand ça arrive à la question de santé ou de santé mentale ou autre, pour que les familles puis les vétérans pourraient en bénéficier?

Mr. Jamie West: Merci, pour mon ami le député de Mushkegowuk-Baie James.

I'm going to stop torturing people with my French at that point.

I think it is important to look at the community in whole. I think it's important that we really, really have a better understanding—my mind wandered; I was actually thinking about French services for military members. I think it goes back again to we need to speak to people who have served about what they want, what they need and how we can help them best. We can have great ideas but go in the wrong direction, and so I really want to go back to the importance of speaking with veterans in the military of how we can help best.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for a quick question and a quick response. I turn to the member from Whitby.

Mr. Lorne Coe: For many of the service people returning back to our communities, finding a job is really a challenge—it can be. A feature of this particular legislation is employment readiness, which I certainly value because it helps so many veterans reintegrate into our communities.

I'd like to hear from the member from Sudbury on his particular view about the effect of that employment-readiness feature in his own riding.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Sudbury has 20 seconds.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you, Speaker. Very briefly, because I only have 20 seconds, I think this is going to be very important to people returning. I forget the exact stat, but we do know that there tends to be difficulty when transitioning from a military life to a civilian life. I think employment readiness is really going to help veterans to be successful and keep them off the streets.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The time for debate on this matter has expired.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DOMENICO PANICCIA

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I am thankful for the opportunity to rise in this House to recognize and honour the life of York South–Weston resident Domenico Paniccia. On Wednesday, September 9, Mr. Paniccia passed away peacefully, surrounded by his family in the comfort of his home.

Domenico was a kind man and would always try to help others. He was a proud first president of the Pelmo Park seniors' group that he was instrumental in creating. Domenico's loving family described him as a devoted, loving and supportive husband to his late wife, Giuseppina. Together, they immigrated from Italy to Canada in 1964 to build a life instilled with the values of unconditional love, hard work and togetherness within their family and community.

There was never a moment where he wasn't offering something to his neighbours, a testament to his deep-rooted generosity and hospitality within his home. I thank Domenico Paniccia for the many contributions he made to York South–Weston. Domenico loved his community and his community loved him back. Hopefully, we can all learn from his legacy and be kind, gentle and generous in our walk through life.

My condolences to Domenico's family. I leave you with what Domenico Paniccia often liked to say: "My home is your home. Saluto."

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mrs. Robin Martin: Two weeks ago, I welcomed the Premier and the Minister of Education to Loretto Abbey Catholic Secondary School in my riding of Eglinton–Lawrence to announce \$550 million to build and expand schools in Ontario, including \$24 million in funding for the school we met at.

Loretto Abbey has been in its current location since 1927, but it was founded in 1847, when six Loretto sisters came from Ireland in the midst of a pandemic and founded a girls' school named after the abbey in the area they came from.

Our recent announcement was made in the Sister Evanne Hunter learning commons. Sister Evanne was the principal of the abbey for many years. She recently shared with me that she has received hundreds of emails from past

students who are absolutely thrilled about the announcement. Sister Evanne herself told me that it was the happiest day of her life.

A few years ago, the remaining sisters moved out and the Toronto Catholic District School Board acquired the entire building in 2011. This funding will be used to upgrade the building to modern standards and to add 620 student places through renovations to the former convent in the historic building.

I know that many future students will continue to make great memories at Loretto Abbey.

SIKH GENOCIDE

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Every year, I struggle with writing this speech. How can my words capture the horror of genocide, to share the story of how Sikhs—who stood tall and proud, who looked just like me—had to run and hide from state-sponsored mobs who had but one focus, one goal: murder in the most vicious of ways? Tires were placed around their necks. Kerosene was poured on their heads. They were set on fire, burned alive in the street as the police stood by and watched or, worse, participated in the murder.

Elected officials, just like you and I sitting in this assembly today, ordering the death of Sikhs—betrayal, breaking our most sacred oath to protect those we serve. Combustible powder was used on the flesh of Sikhs. Children were beheaded. Women were raped.

It's been 36 years. What more can I say about 1984, other than: We will never forget the violence, the genocide that we faced at the hands of the Indian government, and more, we will never stop fighting for justice.

1020

VETERANS

Mrs. Gila Martow: As Remembrance Day approaches, I want to take the time to highlight the veterans and also call out to my colleague the MPP for Flamborough–Glanbrook, who is hoping to achieve with her upcoming PMB, the Exalting Our Veterans Act, 2020, that an individual may request to be identified as a veteran on his or her driver's licence or a photo card. I am hopeful that all members of this Legislature will support year-round support for our veterans by supporting this initiative, as we seem to be all supporting the updates to the Soldiers' Aid Commission, which we just debated this week.

Our Canadian veterans represent all communities across our province and country. As the representative for Thornhill, I'd like to highlight the sacrifices made by our Jewish war veterans. There were 17,000 Jewish men and women who served Canada during World War II. Every Remembrance Day as far as back as I can remember, Norm Gardner officiated and presented awards to some of them. Last year was included. This year, it's going to be tough; maybe we'll have a virtual ceremony. It took place

at the Jewish War Veterans of Canada memorial near the Lipa Green Centre at the Sherman campus in York Centre, and I'm fairly certain that former MPP Monte Kwinter attended every year while he was elected.

I just want to mention that Jewish tradition has storytelling from generation to generation. That's how we pass down information. It's very important that we do the same with our veterans, that we share their stories, highlight their sacrifices and remember them every day, not just on Remembrance Day.

TREATIES RECOGNITION

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I rise today in support of the land defenders at 1492 Land Back Lane.

The Haudenosaunee have lived for thousands of years in the area known today as the Haldimand Tract, and a treaty with the British crown in 1784 guarantees their entitlement to this land. However, in what has become a familiar story in Ontario, their rights have not been recognized and they now face the prospect of forcible removal from their land.

The Haudenosaunee have been waiting for justice for far too long. They have seen the federal and provincial governments continue to pass the buck, refusing to listen to community while their land is being stolen for unwanted development. They have spent decades in the courts to no avail. Now Premier Ford has abdicated his responsibilities, leaving the OPP to enforce the will of the developers.

Police enforcement of a unilateral decision is not a sign of nation-to-nation relationship. Of what use are land acknowledgements if Indigenous people continue to be forcibly removed from the land that is demonstrably theirs?

The critical work of reconciliation cannot occur without respecting Indigenous sovereignty, and that work must start now. I echo the land defenders at 1492 Land Back Lane, as well as the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council and the Six Nations Elected Council, in their call for a moratorium on development to allow for a thorough and respectful nation-to-nation negotiation.

FOOD FOR LIFE

Mr. Parm Gill: I rise in recognition of Food for Life, a community organization locally managed by two leaders in my riding of Milton, Lori Brading and Melani Bastians. Food for Life is helping those most vulnerable with the goal of making Milton hunger-free by sourcing surplus food, like fruits, vegetables, dairy and meat.

Through the generous donation by the Hadley Family Foundation and in partnership with the Optimist Club of Milton, Food for Life is pleased to announce their new refrigerated van is ready to keep serving the Milton community. This van will make sure their food rescue and redistribution efforts can continue. What's more, Food for Life will be using the van to deliver a new mobile outreach program on Wednesday evenings at the Milton Sports Centre, along with free dinners being offered every

Sunday from 5 to 8 p.m. at participating restaurants, like Caribbean Vibes and the Mills BBQ.

I want to thank both Lori and Melani for their tremendous work in the community and for making a tremendous difference.

THE HOSPICE FACE TO FACE CAMPAIGN

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Good morning, Speaker. I rise today to tell you once again the good people in Windsor and Essex county have come through financially for our local hospice.

For the past 18 years, a friend of mine has run a Face to Face campaign for hospice. It's a simple concept: You donate \$10, then you ask nine of your friends to donate \$10, and before you know it, you've helped raise \$100 for a good cause. John Fairley is the vice-president of college communications and community relations at St. Clair College. For 20 years, he has also been the host of a show on our local cable channel called Face to Face. He interviews the movers and shakers from around town, and his show is one of the more highly rated ones on our local cable channel.

For this year's campaign for hospice, despite money being tight thanks to COVID layoffs, they brought in almost \$96,000. Over the last 18 years, Mr. Fairley has helped raise more than \$1.2 million for our local hospice. All of the money raised goes directly to the hospice. There's no middleman. There's no management fee. There's no corporate rake-off. It's all used to help support patients and their families during their stay at the hospice.

Had I been wearing a cap this morning, Speaker, I would certainly tip it for John Fairley and his Face to Face campaign for the Hospice of Windsor and Essex County.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Crime Prevention Week is a perfect time to highlight the partnership between Guelph police and the Canadian Mental Health Association Waterloo Wellington, called the Integrated Mobile Police and Crisis Team, or IMPACT.

It is clear that the current policing enforcement model is not adequately equipped to respond to mental health crisis calls. I want to thank police chief Gord Cobey and staff who have recognized this limitation by partnering with CMHA to respond to mental health calls.

IMPACT is a big success. The team of crisis response coordinators working with Guelph police have diverted 130 people from hospital over five months. The result is:

(1) Police officers can focus on community safety needs that reflect their training.

(2) There are reduced demands on hospital resources.

(3) And most importantly, it reduces trauma for individuals in crisis.

This partnership unfortunately has limitations, however, due to the funding model. Guelph police are funded 24/7, but CMHA staff are only funded to 11 p.m. every

night. So I would call on the government to provide funding for a 24/7 mental health response for people in crisis so that programs like IMPACT can grow in Guelph and in communities across Ontario.

CANADIAN SOLDIERS

Mr. Roman Baber: I rise to honour the 2.3 million Canadian servicemen and women who served and continue to serve our great nation and the 118,000 Canadians who made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty.

When the world is at war, Canada stands with its allies in defence of freedom. From the trenches of Vimy Ridge to the mountains of Afghanistan, we must remember all Canadians who served and died in every war, armed conflict and peacekeeping mission.

We remember the 650,000 Canadians who served in World War I and mourn the 66,000 killed. We remember the more than 1 million Canadians who served in World War II and the 45,000 who did not come home. We remember the 26,000 Canadians who served in Korea and the 516 who died at war. We remember the 30,000 Canadians who fought in Vietnam and the 134 who were killed. We remember the 56,000 Canadian peacekeepers who served in the Balkans and the 23 who died on European soil yet again.

But, Speaker, we must also remember a more recent conflict. Between 2001 and 2018, more than 40,000 Canadian men and women served in Afghanistan. Altogether, 158 Canadians lost their lives in the fight against the Taliban.

Canada's commitment to peace and democracy around the world has come at a great price. But make no mistake: The men and women we remember in November fought and died for the very principles that define us as Canadians.

I'm proud of Canada's Armed Forces. I'm proud to be Canadian. God bless our men and women in uniform. Let us not forget.

1030

EVENTS IN BARRIE–INNISFIL

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I rise in this House to recognize Mike and Jennifer Richardson, also known as Keeping Up with the Richardsons, in Innisfil. This weekend, they organized a Halloween contest in Innisfil where people entered for \$10 and the proceeds went to the Innisfil food bank and Christmas for Kids. Jennifer's goal was to have 50 homes participate by decorating and she had 100 homes participate.

Thanks to local businesses that donated many prizes, we were able to award 13 winners. Thanks to small businesses like Johnny Burger, Innisfil Dental, Cookstown Antique Market, Sweet Home Essentials, to name so many more.

Today, Jennifer announced another community event that she's organizing called Light It Up Innisfil, where she's encouraging residents to decorate their home for the

holiday season, be it Christmas, Hanukkah or Kwanzaa, to bring the spirit of giving alive, again with all proceeds going to the Innisfil food bank and Christmas for Kids, two local organizations that make a very big difference in our backyard.

Like so many of the businesses I have mentioned that also make a big difference and donated prizes—to name some more: A Good Balance, Miss Jennie's, Rose's Fiscotti; of course, we have Lavender Floral. And we have many councillors, like our deputy mayor, Dan Davidson, who gave a gift card, along with Carolyn Payne and Donna Orsatti.

So thank you to the mayor, who participated, all the councillors and our MP, John Brassard. And thank you to the Richardsons.

QUESTION PERIOD

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Premier. Earlier this summer, the Premier claimed that he would be taking urgent action to deal with the crisis in long-term care. I quote: "We've been very clear that the system in Ontario has been broken, and we must act quickly."

Yesterday, months after his own expert staffing study called for a minimum standard of four hours of hands-on care a day, the Premier announced that the government would be implementing a watered-down version of that plan, but that it would take five years to do it. What happened to, "We must act quickly"?

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

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. There are two issues here. One is the urgent measures that we've been taking to shore up our long-term-care homes during the COVID-19 crisis, as well as the longer-term staffing stabilization plan that we remained very aware of.

As soon as a stand-alone, dedicated ministry to long-term care was created, we listened to the sector to understand the issues there. We've been acting all along with every measure possible, getting integration with hospitals, getting the infection prevention and control teams, shoring up staffing, looking at a whole staffing strategy informed by a staffing advisory panel, an expert advisory panel, as well as the early guidance from the commissioners. This has been ongoing and we will not stop.

We are committed to our most vulnerable people in long-term care. That staffing work is being done and we're getting the support to our homes as we speak.

The average of four hours of care to our most vulnerable people, the announcement yesterday—this is monumental.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's been clear throughout this pandemic that all the time the Premier spent delaying and

every time he tried to cut corners and postpone investments, lives were lost in our long-term-care homes.

But in other provinces, they snapped to action, hiring thousands of PSWs and permanently boosting their wages. They truly moved heaven and earth to get staff to the front line, while the Ford government's expert panel report, which the minister mentioned, sat on the shelf.

Does the Premier realize that seniors and PSWs struggling in long-term care right now can't wait five years for action? Does he realize that?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you again. I think the concept of the average of four hours for direct care per resident, per day is an absolute imperative for our long-term-care residents, for the high-quality care that they deserve and need. This is something that our government has been working on consistently.

Our plan has hard targets. We will be monitoring and making sure that every step of the way, every single action that can be taken to get tens of thousands of workers trained and into the field will be done.

The previous government neglected this for 17 years. Previous governments put this on the table and never implemented. Our government is dedicated to making sure that this happens, and we have a plan. We have the hard targets. We are making sure that the staffing that our long-term-care sector has needed for so long is going to be addressed.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm not sure a target five years in the future is a hard target.

Sadly, families and front-line staff in long-term care have stopped believing in commitments from the Ford government. The Ford government promised an iron ring around long-term care. Since then, over 2,000 seniors have died. They were promised that no expense would be spared and that the government was taking urgent action to prepare for a second wave. Instead, the government is attempting to rewrite the law so that they will be protected from lawsuits—not the families.

The Premier has utterly failed to protect seniors in the last six months. Why would anyone believe that he's going to do it in the next five years?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: COVID-19 has been an unprecedented challenge across the world. Our government moved swiftly, across ministries, working in collaboration with governments and the sector, to take every measure possible and to plan. And that is exactly what we put dollars behind. We put \$243 million out on an urgent basis to support our homes, issued four emergency orders, amended regulations, continued to put an integrated process in place to assist our homes. Now we are making sure to address the long-standing, long-neglected issue of staffing in our long-term-care homes, really neglected for many years.

The opposition party has presented Bill 13, but it contains no time frame or plan to achieve the four hours of care per resident per day. Our government has a plan. We have the hard targets. We are putting measures in place to

make sure that those targets are achieved. We are working, as we speak, about return of service for PSWs and nurses, fast-tracking—

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

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning. This question is for the Premier. On September 23, the Minister of Education said, "We are cognizant that the risk in our schools is reflective of the risk within our community...."

On that day, the province was reporting 335 new cases, and there were a total of 180 cumulative cases related to schools. But just five weeks later and we're seeing an average of 919 new cases a day in Ontario and 1,338 school-related cases in the past two weeks alone. Speaker, if growing community spread puts our schools at greater risk, why haven't there been new supports made available to keep them safe?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you very much. We are incredibly proud of the hard work of front-line educators, of principals, of public health nurses and doctors within each of our communities, working so hard to reduce the risk. In this province, 99.9997% of schools are open, meaning of 4,800 schools in this province, there is a single example that is closed. Some 99% of students and 99% of staff have never contracted COVID, and 88% of schools have never had a case of COVID. Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the angst each and every one of these cases will bring to a school. Of 1.5 million kids and 200,000 students, there are 2,300 cumulative cases province-wide.

We are doing everything we can, following public health advice, working closely with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, to ensure that every school, every community and every student remains safe in this province.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I can tell you that the minister's assurances ring pretty hollow for parents and kids who have been impacted by cases in their schools. Fifty-eight students at one Scarborough school are in isolation as we speak because they were exposed. Teachers and early childhood educators had to call in the Ministry of Labour because they felt unsafe. Conseil scolaire Viamonde are facing such staffing shortages that they've written parents, asking them to sign up and fill roles as custodians and clerks and educational assistants. This plan is not scaling up to meet the challenge our schools are facing.

Will the Premier listen to parents and education workers and act now to keep our schools safe and give them the supports they need to stay safely open?

1040

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We accept that transmission in the community is high. That's the basis for why, in this province, well before we even announced modified stage 2 in communities like York, this government took proactive action to allocate funding—\$50 million of our \$1.3-billion allocation, the single largest investment in this country—to ensure that schools are safe, and the data speaks for itself.

While we appreciate, as parents and uncles and aunts and people who are committed to public education, the safety of our staff and our students, we acknowledge that amongst 1.5 million children, 200,000 students, there has been a cumulative total of 2,300 cases.

Now, we acknowledge and agree with the member that each of those cases brings angst to a community, but we need to be proud of the work of our front-line workers, who every day demonstrate incredible courage to keep our students safe. It is for that basis we're going to continue to have their backs, continue to flow the funds and ensure the protocol remains robust, so that every student in every school is safe in this province.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Our educators and our education staff are exhausted, and it's only the beginning of November. Our students are anxious. Our parents are concerned. They have no confidence in this government's ability to keep their schools safely open.

We've got a school board that is pleading with parents to sign up to help teach their own kids. This is going to take more than some commitments to attend job fairs or career fairs and a few dollars here and there. The point is, this is a government that is consistently chasing after problems instead of getting out in front of them. By doing the very bare minimum and sitting on federal dollars—\$9.3 billion federal dollars—they are putting our kids and their learning at risk.

Mr. Speaker, I'll ask again: When will this government start to actually spend the dollars that they've been given and stop just sitting on them?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: If the member opposite wants politicians to not be reactive, then a year ago, when we had an opportunity to proactively support online learning, because we thought it was prudent in this province to have a backstop—the members opposite defended the status quo, because of course if there is a political party that is most averse to change, it is the New Democratic Party, with the support of their Liberal colleagues.

This party believes in innovation. We believe in providing choice for parents, and we believe now more than ever that the investments, the protocol and the guidance by the Chief Medical Officer of Health have ensured two things, that students are safe within schools and that at the Ministry of Education we provide a quality, high, national-leading standard of online learning. We can do both in this province, and we will.

COLLEGE STANDARDS AND ACCREDITATION

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. Canada Christian College's now-hidden financial statements demonstrate a lack of financial responsibility. The CCC calls itself a registered charity, but those financial statements they have scrubbed from the Web show the charity is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on line items like travel and automobiles. Photos that have

suspiciously been scrubbed from the Internet show Charles McVety and his immediate family using the quads, jet skis and pleasure craft of Canada Christian College for their own personal use. They even referred to this equipment as "new toys."

Speaker, will the Premier be conducting an open review of the college's financial stability and make all of the findings public before he lets Charles McVety run a university in the province of Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Colleges and Universities to respond.

Hon. Ross Romano: With respect to the parts of the question that the member opposite raises about the PEQAB process, about the financial elements of the process, that's a part that is done by an independent body—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Ross Romano:—and obviously, as the member opposite knows, we on our side of the House do not meddle with independent advisory boards.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Ross Romano: That is not what our role is. We take our position very seriously.

Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday to the member opposite and will say again—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Ross Romano:—all of our individual universities and colleges must go through a process. Any single time that any individual, any organization applies for any type of a licence or a designation, they must go through a procedural process. That is something that is guaranteed. That is something that we are ensuring is happening in a fair, open, accountable and transparent way. That is what we are doing. That is why we are in this House debating this right now. That is why we have taken these courses of action.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I wish to inform the House that if the heckling continues, I will start calling you to order by the name of your riding, and your constituents will know.

Supplementary question?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I feel a little bad for the minister, having to carry water on this issue and on behalf of the Premier who has put their entire caucus in this debacle, but I can sense the trepidation in his answer, in his voice.

We already know one of the reasons the financial statements were scrubbed from the Internet was because McVety loaned himself and his son \$1 million for housing and cars. In the 2018 statements, McVety spent \$110,000 on automobiles. And in the 2019 statements, he spent another \$170,000 on automobiles. We don't know if the CCC purchased McVety's Jaguar out of those funds, but what we do know is that the quads on campus and the jet skis in the marina and the pleasure craft in the parking lot are all available for his own personal use. Of course, photo evidence of McVety using all of these luxury items has mysteriously disappeared from the Internet.

Speaker, it looks like a personal slush fund because it obviously is a personal slush fund. Why is the government bending over backwards to approve what this man does with his school's finances?

Hon. Ross Romano: What the member opposite clearly demonstrates time and time again, as do all of the members opposite, is a complete and utter non-appreciation of procedural fairness, and the fact that they do so is beyond me.

Let's just talk about the facts. Let's talk about what the facts truly are here. Last year, when I became the Minister of Colleges and Universities, I went through and spoke to every single college and university president across the entire sector. Do you know what the number one complaint they had was? That it took upwards of three years to get a program approval process done. We took that program approval process and we expedited that process where we had institutions apply directly to PEQAB, an independent advisory board. We took the PEQAB process, we simplified it and now these types of processes last three to six months.

To take it up a step, we dealt with Algoma University and OCAD University seeking similar designations as now, and we have married a legislative process with a ministerial process—a fair, transparent, open process.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: There's a marriage there.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Essex will come to order.

The next question?

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: The Premier's first official tour in my riding of Carleton back in March 2019 was to visit the Osgoode Care Centre, a non-profit, charitable, long-term-care home located in Metcalfe. These actions speak louder than words, and the Premier's visit a year and a half ago reaffirms what we all know, that one of the Premier's top priorities is the welfare of our long-term-care residents in places like Metcalfe and across the province.

This virus has shone a spotlight on the deep cracks in our broken long-term-care system. Our government inherited a long-term-care system that suffered deeply from decades of underinvestment and neglect. The people of Ontario put their faith and trust in the Premier to fix this broken system, and the Premier made a commitment to families and caregivers that our government would fix this broken system.

We've delivered a plan with over half a billion dollars to prepare our long-term-care homes. Speaker, can the Premier please share with the Legislature how our government is addressing some of the key recommendations from the long-term-care commission inquiry appointed in July?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank the member from Carleton. She's doing an absolutely great job up there. I want to give a big shout-out to the nurses and the PSWs in long-term care. They're absolute champions. They are all-stars. They're out there on the front lines, and they don't

get exhausted after a couple of months, by the way. They've been going about six, seven, eight months now, full steam ahead.

I'm proud to announce that we'll be increasing the average daily direct care in our homes to four hours a day.

Ms. Catherine Fife: For 2025.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Doug Ford: I know the opposition tried to do it for God knows how long—20 years, and so did the Liberals try for 20 years, but they haven't been able to get it done. We're the only government setting a gold standard, blazing a new trail for long-term care with four hours of care every single day.

We will be the gold standard around North America, and I just want to thank again the nurses and the PSWs.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: This is wonderful news for the long-term-care residents at the Osgoode Care Centre, the people of Carleton and all Ontarians.

We've delivered a plan with over half a billion dollars to prepare our long-term-care homes for future waves and surges of COVID-19. I know that for many of Carleton's residents, this announcement will mean that the increased level of care will dramatically enhance the quality of life and care for their loved ones. This will help ensure that residents will have the support they need when it comes to taking their heart medications three times a day. This will mean that elderly individuals can get the assistance they deserve with bathing, a change of clothes, and meals. To our residents and their families and caregivers, four hours a day will make a world of difference, and Ontario is leading the charge on this.

1050

Can the Premier please share with the Legislature what the response has been from the sector to this great announcement by our government?

Hon. Doug Ford: Again, I want to thank the member. You know what else is critical that the opposition didn't do? They never gave these folks an increase. For the first time, they're actually seeing an increase through our government in pay per hour.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take the opportunity to read out a few quotes, one being Jerry Dias, president of Unifor. He said about our government's announcement: "Ontario's long-term-care system has been in crisis far too long"—way too long; 17 years—and, "This announcement gives workers and residents hope for brighter days ahead ... I am relieved that [Premier Ford] listened to our demands and is committed to fixing our long-term-care sector."

Another great statement from Patty Coates, the president at the Ontario Federation of Labour: "The Ontario Federation of Labour ... is pleased that the Ford government has recognized the urgent need to establish a legally enforceable minimum standard of an average of four hours of direct care...."

This is a game-changer. This is something that the other government talked, talked, talked about but couldn't do anything—

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

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker. This question is to the Premier. This week is Treaties Recognition Week. Ontario is a signatory to Treaty 9, as is Neskantaga. Neskantaga was evacuated 16 days ago because of a public health emergency. They have no safe running water in the community.

Now they are being left out of the environmental assessment consultation for the supply road to the Ring of Fire. Neskantaga told this government in September that it could not engage in the process in a meaningful way because of the pandemic. Now they're expected to consult in the middle of a public health crisis.

Speaker, why is this EA process proceeding without Neskantaga?

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

Mr. Dave Smith: Last year, our government signed a historic agreement with the communities of Webequie and Marten Falls with respect to the road leading into the Ring of Fire. We continue having ongoing negotiations and conversations with the First Nation communities around the Ring of Fire, and we'll continue to make sure that we consult with all of the communities that are involved.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Back to the Premier: Neskantaga has been without safe tap water since February 1995, over a quarter of a century. We need a gold standard on this.

Renita Moonias is a mother of two young children, from Neskantaga. She was born in 1996, which means she has never experienced clean tap water. Now, as a mother, she will not wash her children with the tap water because it causes sores and skin infections. She has to use bottled water to bathe her children, aged 1 and 3. She hopes that clean water will flow before her children become of an age where they remember having to live this way.

Speaker, we must do better for her children. Ontario must do better for her children. Why is this government, why is Ontario ignoring and not helping Neskantaga through this crisis?

Interjections.

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

The Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to reply.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thank you for that question. I thought I'd give an update on where the province is at. We've been leveraging the provincial expertise through the Indigenous drinking water projects office and its two agencies, the Ontario Clean Water Agency and the Walkerton Clean Water Centre, to support Neskantaga First Nation in the completion of their newly constructed water plant.

Two days ago, a team from the Ontario Clean Water Agency flew into the community after receiving an invitation from the chief. They have started the commission of

the water plant and an assessment of the water system infrastructure. They will conduct a 14-day stress test for the plant and provide high-level recommendations for longer-term system sustainability focused on removing the boil-water advisory that has been in place, as the member opposite mentioned, since the 1990s. We remain committed to helping ensure that water infrastructure in the community is well maintained and in place for future needs.

Mr. Speaker, I'm with the member opposite. I call upon the federal government to step up and take care of the promise to remove boil-water advisories across the entirety of First Nation communities. Step up with the money and make this happen.

COLLEGE STANDARDS AND ACCREDITATION

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier. So it's another day and it's another Charles McVety revelation. Yesterday, he said the NDP were anti-Christian. He's the same guy who said that Islam is not a religion and who has said so many hateful things about Ontario's LGBT community.

Charles McVety preaches fear and division. But make no mistake about it, this isn't about religion. It's not about faith. It's not about God. It's not even about education. This is all about money. Giving Charles McVety the ability to grant more dubious degrees allows him to cash in, adds to his bottom line to fill up what looks like his own personal piggy bank.

Speaker, through you, can the Premier explain why he's continuing to allow this bill to go forward?

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

Hon. Ross Romano: Again, any organization out there, any college which seeks to obtain status of this nature, which seeks to grant degrees, any institution across this entire province has three options by which to do that. They can proceed by way of a private bill. Any member in this House can rise and introduce a private bill. It goes directly to a committee, a very sheltered process. It never gets debated in this House—a very sheltered process, not very transparent.

The second option is it can proceed through ministerial consent. I explained that process in my last question, whereby in applying for ministerial consent, the institution now applies directly to PEQAB, an independent advisory board. That's not the way it used to be, Mr. Speaker. We simplified that process in last year's red tape bill. A third option is to bring it forward in legislation in this House.

We've taken the second option and the third option and we've married those two options together. We have created the most clear, transparent way to obtain this type of relief that is possible, the most clear way that has existed in this government ever.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, this is all about patronage. The Premier has dodged questions for a week. He's here today. I'd like to get an answer.

At least the Deputy Premier, in a scrum last week, had the courage to stand up and say that hate and the kind of things that we're hearing have no place in Ontario. She's the only one, and I know how everybody feels over there. She did what leaders do. You address the issue head-on.

So, Speaker, is the Premier ever going to step up or is he just hoping this will go away and that we'll all forget? Because we're not going to. Will the Premier step up and do the thing that leaders do, address the issue and remove schedule 2 from Bill 213 today, and make that commitment?

Interjections.

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

One more time, I'll remind members not to make reference to the absence of another member.

The Minister of Colleges and Universities to reply.

Hon. Ross Romano: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to provide clarity as to the work that our government has been doing under the great leadership of our Premier—outstanding leadership throughout this period of time that we've been dealing with COVID-19. Over several months, we've flattened the curve under the leadership of our Minister of Health. Our team has done an incredible job at addressing COVID-19 and the people of this province are well aware of that.

Mr. Speaker, the question that the member opposite raises, especially as a member of the former government, a former government that sat by and allowed processes for colleges to obtain degree-granting approval to take in excess of two, sometimes upwards of three and even more than three years—talk about red tape.

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That's why in last year's red tape bill, we amended it. We changed it. We simplified the process and we made it a transparent process. Two institutions went through the bill last year, Algoma University as well as OCAD University, and now three more institutions are going through that same exact transparent, open and accountable process.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs. Robin Martin: My question is to the Minister of Long-Term Care. I've heard many times from constituents who are concerned about staffing levels in long-term care. It's clear that staffing has been an issue across the long-term-care sector for a very long time. We know that the staffing issue did not arise overnight and that it will take time and effort to resolve. We've seen that the COVID-19 pandemic has put further stress on long-term-care homes and exacerbated staffing problems that they had after years of neglect.

I know that the minister and her team have been reviewing the staffing study and developing a plan to fix staffing in long-term care for future generations. Could the minister update this House on what she is doing to improve staffing levels in long-term care?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: I'd like to thank the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for her question and her excellent work. Thank you.

We're acting on our commitment to protect loved ones in long-term care by increasing the average daily level of direct care to four hours a day per resident. This will ensure that the needs of seniors are met, help keep them safer and provide them with higher quality of life. Ensuring that standard of direct care was one of the interim recommendations made by the Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission. While the commission completes its work, our government will not wait to act. Along with the commission, this was recommended by the staffing study expert panel, and we have taken their recommendations to heart.

There is much work still to be done, and I look forward to updating the House as we progress in creating a long-term-care system for the 21st century.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you, Minister, for that response. Last week, I was in this chamber when the member for Ottawa South stood up and boasted about voting for three previous versions of Bill 13, while the government and the ministry that he was part of never implemented it. I should also note that the former government was elected in 2003 on a promise to bring in a minimum standard of care of 2.25 hours and then never implemented any minimum standard of care. I am glad to be part of a government that is making the sorely needed changes in long-term care happen.

Four hours of direct care is an excellent step towards improving resident care in the province, good for the personal, medical and psychological needs of residents, and a reassurance to their loved ones. Can the minister expand on what will have to be done to ensure that all residents can receive an average of four hours of direct care per day?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Again, thank you for your good work, to the member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Improving the quality of life and care for long-term-care residents is the cornerstone of our approach to long-term care. The new commitment to improve quality of care includes:

- an average daily direct care of four hours a day per resident, and that means hands-on care is provided by nurses and personal support workers to support individual, clinical and personal care needs;

- hard targets set over the next four years to achieve this standard by 2024-25, and this progress against these targets will be measured and reported regularly; and

- an unprecedented change to educate and recruit the tens of thousands of new personal support workers, registered practical nurses and nurses that will be required.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Suze Morrison: My question is for the Premier. It's the second wave of the pandemic, but it's clear that the Premier is back to his old ways. In my riding of Toronto Centre and my colleague Chris Glover's riding of Spadina–Fort York, the Premier is cutting a special deal for developer insiders to build new condos on provincial land in the West Don Lands. He's using the heavy hand of a

ministerial zoning order to bypass the rules and regulations that exist to give my community, our community, a voice in local decisions. Coincidentally, it's been revealed that those same developers have donated \$25,000 to the Premier's party over the last three years.

Why is this government cutting special deals for their developer friends who appear to have insider connections and have donated significant amounts of money to their party?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant, the member for Milton.

Mr. Parm Gill: I want to thank the member opposite for that question. These MZO's issued by the minister in the West Don Lands leverage unused, provincial properties to create almost a thousand new affordable homes in Toronto West Don Lands. These projects will also create 17,000 square feet of new community space to support the local community's needs.

The builders signed an exclusive lease agreement for these sites with the previous Liberal government. Since the groups were chosen by the Liberal government, any attempt to link the MZO's with political connection is completely baseless and not supported by fact.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: Your government passed the ministry zoning order; I don't know why you can pass it on to another party.

My question is for the Premier. The Premier is on record as saying the West Don Lands developer deal has a guarantee of affordable housing, but when the Toronto Star reviewed the terms of the agreements, that turned out to be false. Toronto and Ontario are facing an affordable housing crisis, but, apparently, this government's priority is to collect political donations from deep-pocketed developers who want to bypass planning orders and rules and community voice.

Over in Pickering, the government has cut another deal for another development. This time, he's allowing them to pave over environmentally sensitive wetlands. Why is no one in the Conservative caucus standing up and saying that the Premier should not be cutting special deals for insiders?

To the Premier: We are in the middle of a global pandemic. Why is your priority pushing through developer deals for your buddies?

Mr. Parm Gill: The city of Toronto has consistently called on the province to build more affordable housing; that's exactly what these projects will do. Given that the agreements that selected the developer to build on these lands was conducted and signed by the previous Liberal government, any suggestion that our government favoured them is nonsensical.

Let me also point out, a senior executive of Kilmer donated to the NDP. A senior executive from Kilmer group also donated to Steven Del Duca's recent leadership campaign. In fact, donations from senior executives of these companies total at least \$12,314 to Steven Del Duca's Ontario Liberal Party and the NDP as well.

OPIOID ABUSE

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: My question is for the Minister of Health. Since 2016, over 5,000 people in Ontario have died from opioid overdoses—more than the number of people who have died of COVID-19. In August, the Liberal Minister of Health sent a letter to this government advocating for only one proposed solution: the funding, production and distribution by this government of pharmaceutical grade drugs for consumption, which they refer to as “safe supply of narcotics.”

Recently, the mayor of Cambridge made public statements in support of this, advocating for the safe supply of pharmaceutical grade drugs to work in tandem with drug consumption sites.

Can the minister tell us if this government is in favour of and has any plans to fund production and distribution of a safe supply of hard narcotics in Ontario?

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

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you for that question. Mr. Speaker, our government takes the opioid crisis very seriously. Our government, as you know, just a few weeks ago, along with Premier Doug Ford, announced an additional \$176 million being invested toward building a comprehensive and connected mental health and addictions system where every Ontarian could be fully supported.

As part of this funding, we made targeted investments, which is long overdue, ensuring that money was being invested to look after the addiction challenges we have in the province. That included \$4 million being invested in nurse practitioners for detox services, \$8 million for addictions day and evening care, \$3.5 million in in-home and mobile withdrawal management services, and an additional \$900,000 for in-patient beds to support capacity pressures at CAMH.

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: The root cause of the opioid epidemic is people with addiction issues using lethal drugs laced with fentanyl, accessed over the Internet and illegally shipped here from China, often by Canada Post. Thousands are being poisoned from illicit drugs made in China. I find it concerning that the federal Liberal government's only proposed solution is a safe supply, while ignoring other possible methods to reduce demand or supply.

Can the minister tell us, in this government's close relationship with Prime Minister Trudeau, have they ever advocated for other solutions, like holding China accountable for the illicit drugs flooding Canada, implementing tougher border controls or giving law enforcement better tools to seek warrants for Canada Post mail in order to stop us from being flooded with this poison from China?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Once again, I want to reiterate the importance of dealing with the opioid crisis and having a strategy in place. Mr. Speaker, this government, for the first time in the history of this Parliament, is

investing \$3.8 billion over 10 years to build this comprehensive plan in the province. This includes implementing a comprehensive suite of policies and programs to address opioid addictions and overdose which are focused on appropriate prescribing and pain management, treatment for opioid use disorder, harm reduction services and supports, and surveillance and reporting. These are fundamental principles, Mr. Speaker, that we are implementing and working as a government to put in place.

As part of our plan, we're also investing up to \$31.3 million in funding for up to 21 consumption treatment services through key regions across the province. We will continue working to ensure that a system is built that works—

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

ELECTRICITY RESTRUCTURING

Mr. Michael Parsa: For too long, Ontario's electricity system has been burdened by the waste and mismanagement of the previous Liberal government. The Liberals spent 15 years adding billions of dollars to the electricity system by signing contracts for power we did not need and could not afford. My constituents are concerned. They're concerned, Speaker, because they understand that when electricity system costs are high, so too are their electricity bills.

Will the Associate Minister of Energy please tell this House what the government is doing to unravel the hydro mess we inherited?

Hon. Bill Walker: Thank you to the great member from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill for all the great work he does on behalf of his constituents. Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government chose ideology over the hard-working people of Ontario and made a mess of our energy system; we all know that. Today, the contracts signed by those Liberals generate only 10% of Ontario's power, but account for almost 30% of its cost.

Mr. Speaker, immediately upon getting elected, we cancelled 751 unneeded renewable energy contracts, saving \$790 million. We centralized conservation programs, saving as much as \$442 million for the taxpayers of Ontario. And we're expanding natural gas to rural and northern Ontario, saving an average residential customer between \$800 and \$2,500 a year.

Mr. Speaker, we are determined to fix the mess left behind by the Liberals and ensure our energy system is reliable and affordable.

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

Mr. Michael Parsa: Speaker, through you to the minister again, I thank the minister for his comment.

To my constituents and, in fact, all Ontarians, Speaker, this is indeed a great deal of progress. Would the minister please let us know how he plans to continue to support Ontarians through the COVID-19 crisis, while rebuilding the electricity system?

Hon. Bill Walker: Thank you again for the great work, to the member from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill. Mr. Speaker, we know there's still much work to be done. That's why we continue to support electricity consumers, as we respond to COVID-19, by providing customer choice, stable rates and financial support to millions of Ontarians who are working and learning from home.

First, Mr. Speaker, we put \$175 million to hold time-of-use electricity prices at the lowest rate 24 hours a day for the first 69 days of the COVID-19 state of emergency. Then, on June 1, we replaced time-of-use rates with a new fixed COVID-19 recovery rate of 12.8 cents per kilowatt until October 31. And now, Mr. Speaker, thanks to our government, Ontarians can choose an energy program that works best for their lifestyle, whether it's through time-of-use electricity rates or tiered rates.

Mr. Speaker, we remain committed to fixing this hydro mess created by the Liberals and supporting Ontarians throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

FLU IMMUNIZATION

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is for the Premier. My office has been flooded with calls about the flu vaccine shortage in Hamilton. Last week I heard from James, who lives in my riding of Hamilton Mountain. He has been looking everywhere for a flu shot for his 80-year-old mother and special needs son. He is rightfully concerned about their health in this flu season and he wants to protect his family. Despite his efforts, no flu shots are available at his doctor's or any of the pharmacies that he has called.

What does the Premier have to say to James and the many out there who just can't get the flu shot because of the shortage?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member for the question. Protecting the health and safety of all Ontarians has been our key priority since taking office, and even more so preparing for the flu campaign.

We ordered last year \$70 million worth of doses. We ordered 5.1 million, 700,000 more doses than last year—and this was long before COVID-19 was even on the horizon. We were then able to purchase another 350,000 through the federal government's reserve and with their assistance.

But what we're dealing with now is really a great situation in the sense that we know that many Ontarians want to protect themselves, their own health, their family's health and that of their friends and neighbours. They've come in record numbers to receive the shots. As of today's date, over one million vaccines have been delivered just through pharmacies, where at this time last year, it was only 250,000.

So I want to thank the people of Ontario for stepping up.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: The people of Ontario would like to thank the minister for being able to get a flu shot—which they're not able to do.

Over and over, the Minister of Health has said that there is no flu vaccine shortage. But across Ontario, people are finding it impossible to get a flu shot. Yesterday, my office received a call from Wayne. He has been looking all over Hamilton to get a flu shot for his mother who is 88 and his father who is 93. He is just trying to protect the health of his parents. Everywhere he calls, Wayne is told that the flu vaccine is unavailable.

Is this what the Premier and the minister envisioned when they made the flu shots a central part of their failing second wave plan?

Hon. Christine Elliott: We have a very robust and comprehensive second wave plan for protecting the health and safety of Ontarians. We did order, as I said, 700,000 more doses before we even knew that COVID was on the horizon; 350,000 extra doses we purchased—5.45 million doses. This is the largest, most significant flu campaign in Ontario's history, and I am very grateful to the people of Ontario for responding to that.

As part of our plan, we also allocated another \$28.5 million in the event that we needed to purchase extra flu vaccines. That's what we're in the process of doing right now. I have spoken with the federal Minister of Health, asking to procure extra supplies from the federal government's pandemic reserve. We're also dealing with global manufacturers, trying to obtain extra vaccines from their reserves.

Again, this is a great success, this flu campaign. I am very, very grateful to the people of Ontario.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is to the Premier. Under the Harris government, the province downloaded the costs of public health services to municipalities in a 50-50 cost-sharing split. The error of that decision became clear in 2004 after the Walkerton water outbreak, the emergence of the West Nile virus and, of course, SARS.

Many reports and commissions urge that public health be entirely provincially funded, or to return to the 75-25 cost-sharing split under the former Liberal government. Before the COVID pandemic, this provincial government revisited the split and once again downloaded the cost of public health to municipalities. This attack on our public health system left municipalities unprepared for the pandemic.

Speaker, through you to the Premier: In your upcoming budget, will you permanently reverse this mistake or will you repeat the mistakes of the Harris government?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member for the question. We are very grateful for the incredible work that our public health units have been doing throughout this entire pandemic. They've been working overtime. They've been helping out with schools; we've got public health nurses now working in schools. We've got public health units doing contact tracing and contact management. So they're doing everything that they needed to do.

But this was a situation with respect to public health that had been commented on by the Auditor General

several times. The previous government didn't do anything to deal with it. We are dealing with it. We did make some suggestions. What we have done is provided extra financial help to the public health units to get us through this pandemic, but we're going to learn lessons and review the system once we're through the second wave to see if any other changes need to be made.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I guess I'm looking for a much clearer answer, because the patchwork approach and reactive nature of responding to the pandemic is not sufficient.

The 60-40 split that your government announced that you were pursuing is not fair or sustainable to public health units, which are mostly funded by municipalities that cannot run deficits. In fact, most municipalities would argue that they don't have the capacity to fully fund those services that are needed by residents. Municipalities that are less wealthy, in fact, with shrinking property tax bases, are struggling, and oftentimes they are the most in need of public health services.

This decision is an important one that you have to make. Your government has said that it wants to end hall-way medicine. In order to do that, you have to see public health as an investment, not an expense, and commit to the fair cost sharing—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. I'll invite the minister to reply.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I'll try to keep my response short here. In fact, what's happened is, we do recognize the importance of public health. It has been important throughout, but it's especially been shown to be important with COVID-19 and the special steps that are being taken by our public health units.

We did have this discussion a number of months ago with respect to some of the changes that we were proposing for public health. But what we're hearing now, Speaker, I can advise you, is that the public health units are happy with the measures that we've taken to mitigate the additional expenses that they've received by allowing those expenses to be contained and for us to continue to help them as they're dealing with COVID-19 through this year and next year.

Public health units, according to us, according to what we've heard from them, are very happy with what's happening right now, and they are able to deal with the public health work that they need to do through COVID-19.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Gurratan Singh: My question is to the Premier. Last week, the Premier came to Brampton and announced that a new hospital was going to be built. Brampton, of course, needs a new hospital. We're a city of over 600,000 people, and we only have one hospital right now. This is nothing new. Brampton has been underfunded by Liberal and Conservative governments for years.

What Brampton needs is a new 24-hour hospital with an emergency room. So let me be very clear: Will this new hospital have a 24-hour emergency room, or is this Premier making another empty promise, yes or no?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member for the question. I was with the Premier last week when he made the announcement in Brampton, and he is sincere about wanting Brampton to have a new hospital, because that's one of the things that we take a look at: population groups. Brampton has grown dramatically in population.

There are other issues that we need to take a look at as well: condition, shape of the existing hospital—in your case, that's not a concern. But there are many factors that have to be taken into consideration. There is a process that has to be entered into, as the member will know, and that is something that we will be pleased to receive and to work through. But it isn't something that you just say, "As of today, this is what it's going to look like," because that's very much up to the municipality to indicate to the government, to the Ministry of Health what it is that you want to have in your community.

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Let me get this straight: The Premier drives all the way out to Brampton to announce that a new hospital is going to be built, but it won't even have a 24-hour emergency room? I think I missed that part of the news conference. So now the over 600,000 people of Brampton are going to have only one hospital to deal with their medical emergencies.

Does the Conservative government honestly think that this is going to fix Brampton's health care crisis? Families are struggling in Brampton. We are struggling with our one underfunded and overcrowded hospital, but this Conservative government won't commit to funding to fix our health care crisis. When will the Premier stop with his empty promises and give Brampton an actual new hospital with a 24-hour emergency room, not just an urgent care centre?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Through you, Speaker, I will remind the member that the purpose of the trip to Brampton was not to announce a new hospital; it was another announcement that the Premier and I were making. However, a question arose with respect to what's happening in Brampton and Brampton's need for a new hospital.

Certainly, there is knowledge that this is a fast-growing area. The population has grown tremendously in Brampton and surrounding area, and so it is incumbent on the local municipality, the local hospital association to come up with a plan for what type of hospital you want to have—with an emergency department, without an emergency department. That's not something the Ministry of Health just decides upon; that is working in consultation with the municipality to understand what the specific needs are. If that's what Brampton wants to do, we invite them to come to the Ministry of Health and speak to us about it.

EDUCATION FUNDING

M^{me} Lucille Collard: My question is for the Minister of Education. Last week, we were able to see the data around sources of COVID-19 outbreaks in Ottawa. While this is only part of the larger picture, it made one thing drastically clear, and that is the fact that outbreaks are overwhelmingly occurring in schools and daycare centres. Classes are not small enough to allow for proper physical distancing. Teachers and school staff are working under a lot of stress. Parents and students are struggling to keep up with constant changes. Our whole education system is exhausted. What else do we need to know for this government to admit that our education system needs more support?

Based on all the evidence that is telling us that COVID-19 is spreading through our schools, why hasn't the Minister of Education capped class sizes across the province at 15 students?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I thank the member opposite for the question. What I can assert is that we appreciate that with rising community transmission, we have to further reduce the risk within our schools. It's why I'm proud to report to this House that as of today, we have well over 2,700 net new educators working in our publicly funded system of education in the province. That does not happen by coincidence; it happens because the province has allocated funding, in conjunction with the feds and reserves, to do that hiring—470 more ECEs, another 1,200 custodians, another 256 EAs. These investments, I think, are realizing more people, reduced classroom sizes and enhanced safety, and that's exactly what the Premier has committed to do.

In addition to those immediate-term actions, we just announced a billion dollars of capital to renew schools in Ottawa and in every region of this province to ensure, after a decade of schools having not been up to the state of repair—we are ensuring that they are quality, state-of-the-art and modern for the students of this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Again to the Minister of Education: Enrolment is down in schools across the province this year because of COVID-19. This is especially true at the kindergarten level, where it seems that a lot of parents have chosen not to send their kids to school at all. With schools receiving funding on a per capita basis, the decrease in enrolment is extremely concerning.

With the October funding adjustment by the ministry to take back money that was granted according to the June projections, schools now need to redistribute students among the number of teachers they are funded for. While this is a normal process every year, the adjustments are not normal this year and have very extreme consequences. That means that schools are collapsing classes into larger classes with even less physical distancing.

Will the minister maintain the funding to school boards according to the projections so that schools don't have to increase class sizes again this year?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Under this government and this Premier, every school board in the province of Ontario is

getting more money, not less. That is part of the \$1.3 billion allocated to ensure that every single school in this province could enhance their layers of prevention.

We have listened to the Chief Medical Officer of Health, to the best pediatric experts in this country, whose opinions have been well socialized and informed our plan. There is a reason why, in this province, amongst 1.5 million children and 200,000 students, the cumulative total to date is 2,300, which represents—roughly 88% of all schools haven't had an example or a case of COVID-19, and 99% of students and staff have not had COVID-19. I appreciate for those who have had the impact to them—it's why we have public health nurses, more than doubling the capacity to support our schools on-site. It's why we continue to invest in the Ministry of Health writ large to ensure we can respond to this pandemic.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier.

Ctrl V is a family-owned business in my riding of Waterloo that has been able to grow into a successful franchise, and they've been doing everything that they can to survive. Businesses in Ontario are desperate for the appropriate supports, including consistent and clear directives from this provincial government. Colin Johnson of the Danforth Mosaic BIA said this in the Toronto Star: "We are going to see a collapse of local business without uniform instructions from the government and (financial) support."

And yet last Thursday, on the same day that the ban on commercial evictions expired, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing was tweeting about maybe proposing to bring forward legislation. It's now Tuesday. Legislation hasn't been tabled. Can the government commit today to tabling legislation to extend the ban on commercial evictions?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant, the member for Willowdale.

Mr. Stan Cho: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I know that during our time on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, we heard from many small businesses, like the one that she mentioned in her riding, and heard exactly what they were asking for when it came to relief during this very difficult time that is COVID-19.

That's why this government responded quickly, first in March, and then increasing the supports in August to \$30 billion. That money has been well received by the small businesses: \$241 million in rent relief, \$50 million in the Ontario Together Fund, \$355 million in employer health tax exemptions, \$175 million in hydro relief, \$8 million in additional support for businesses struggling to pay their energy bills, \$57 million for the Digital Main Street program, and a recent announcement of \$300 million to help those businesses about to enter the revised stage 2, to help with their fixed costs like overhead costs when it comes to hydro and property tax.

Those supports are going to continue. We will weather the storm together.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Ctrl V came to those committee meetings all through the summer, and they feel like you have disrespected them because you have not put their recommendations into play. In the last two months, six of the Ontario locations have permanently closed. The 11 remaining ones have reduced revenue. These locations use every bit of relief, which is mostly federal, but like so many other businesses, they have not been able to access the first commercial rent program. Now they're barely hanging on.

The new commercial rent relief program will only be retroactive to October, but these Ctrl V locations have months of expenses and lost revenues to catch up on. Is this government really willing to let these businesses go and close by not stepping up and providing retroactive support, which is what businesses in the province of Ontario deserve?

Mr. Stan Cho: I certainly understand the struggles that Ctrl V is going through, as well as thousands of other businesses in Ontario. It's a struggle I know very personally, growing up in a small business world and watching my parents struggle even at the best of economic times.

That's why this government has been moving in step with our federal partners to create a program that fills the gaps of the relief provided through Ottawa. That recent announcement of \$300 million is an example of the continued adaptive, prudent support that the people of this province understand.

As the member knows, on November 5, we will table a budget that will outline additional important steps to protect Ontarians, to support them through the pandemic and help our province not just to recover, but to thrive once again.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our question period for this morning. This House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1133 to 1500.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Ottawa South has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Colleges and Universities concerning Charles McVety. This matter will be debated today following private members' public business.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

BROADBAND IS AN ESSENTIAL
SERVICE ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 DÉCLARANT
QUE LE SERVICE À LARGE BANDE
EST UN SERVICE ESSENTIEL

Mr. Vanthof moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 226, An Act to enact the Broadband is an Essential Service Act, 2020 / Projet de loi 226, Loi édictant la Loi de 2020 déclarant que le service à large bande est un service essentiel.

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 will invite the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane to briefly explain his bill, if he chooses to do so.

Mr. John Vanthof: If enacted, the bill enacts the Broadband is an Essential Service Act, 2020, which requires the Minister of Infrastructure to develop a broadband connectivity strategy that aims to deliver high-speed Internet connectivity to 95% of Ontarians by 2026, and to all Ontarians by 2030. The minister is required to update the strategy at specified intervals and undertake certain consultations to developing or updating the strategy.

PETITIONS

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr. Michael Mantha: I have a petition here from the great people of Dubreuilville. It reads:

“Fix the Northern Health Travel Grant...”

“Whereas the Northern Health Travel Grant is supposed to even the playing field so all Ontarians can get the medical care they need, but it is failing too many northern families;

“Whereas successive Conservative and Liberal governments have let northerners down by failing to make health care accessible in the north;

“Whereas not all costs are covered, and reimbursement amounts are small compared to the actual costs, northern families are forced to pay out of pocket to access health care, which is a barrier for seniors and low-income working families;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fix the Northern Health Travel Grant so we can ensure more people get the care they need, when they need it.”

I agree with this petition, affix my name, and present it to the usher to bring down to the Clerks’ table.

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here entitled “Support Bill 222.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government is committed to collaborating with the private sector and our municipal partners to accelerate project delivery for the benefit of all individuals, families, and businesses at a lower cost to the taxpayer; and

“Whereas Ontario is modernizing how key infrastructure projects are built, creating more efficient delivery of

much-needed public services such as public transit, long-term-care beds and increased broadband coverage, while providing better value on our investments; and

“Whereas the Ontario government continues to build smarter and get shovels in the ground faster to build long-term-care homes in places like Mississauga, Ajax, and Toronto, better-connected highway and public transit networks and transit oriented communities;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario vote and pass the Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act, 2020, so that:

“(1) The delivery of transit-oriented communities (TOC) is accelerated;

“(2) The province and its government agencies have a consistent legislative tool kit across TOC programs that will be clear and easy to communicate to municipalities and development partners;

“(3) Ontario further modernizes how key infrastructure projects are built, creating more efficient delivery of much-needed public services such as public transit, long-term-care beds and increased broadband coverage, while providing better value on our investments.”

I will sign my signature and pass it up to the Clerk.

TREATIES RECOGNITION

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank Laurentian University and the University of Sudbury, in particular Dr. Elizabeth Carlson-Manathara and her students Amanda Deforge and Jamie-Leigh LeTourneau, who are students at Laurentian University, for creating this petition. It’s been very successful on change.org. This is the paper version of it.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas treaties are living promises by the crown and First Nations that are part of the constitutional fabric of Canada and that outline mutual obligations and benefits for respectful co-existence in shared territories; and

“Whereas the Robinson-Huron Treaty promises annual compensation (treaty annuities) for the sharing of lands, resources and the wealth created to First Nation treaty beneficiaries, and while a provision was included in the treaty to ensure the annuity amount increased as resource revenues increased, the annuity” has only been “increased once in 1874 from \$1.60 to \$4, and has not changed since; and

“Whereas the failure of the crown to live up to the terms, spirit and intent of the treaty prompted the 21 Robinson-Huron Treaty First Nations to file a statement of claim in 2014 to the crown (both Canada and Ontario); and

“Whereas the Superior Court of Justice Judge Hennessy ruled in the first two phases of the case that (1) the crown has a mandatory and reviewable obligation to increase the treaties’ annuities when economic circumstances warrant, and (2) that the provincial government of Ontario and the government of Canada were jointly and equally liable to respect the treaty; and

“Whereas the province of Ontario maintains that treaty commitments remain valid today and states that it is ‘working to rebuild trust and relationships with treaty partners and Indigenous peoples,’ and yet in contradiction to these statements, Ontario plans to spend taxpayer money to appeal Superior Court of Justice Judge Hennessy’s decisions, fighting First Nations and fighting against the honourable fulfillment of treaty obligations; and

“Whereas the government of Canada has chosen not to appeal Judge Hennessy’s decisions and has asked that Ontario’s appeal be dismissed, and the 21 treaty First Nations have waited long enough for justice;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ensure that the Ontario government honours and upholds the Robinson-Huron Treaty by abandoning its appeals of Justice Patricia Hennessy’s decisions in phase 1 and phase 2 of the Robinson-Huron Treaty annuities case and engages in good-faith negotiations of the terms of just compensation.”

This being Treaties Recognition Week, I will affix my signature. I support this petition and will provide it to the Clerk.

ACCESS TO PERSONAL HEALTH RECORDS

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Personal Health Information Protection Act ... currently allows health information custodians to charge a fee that does not exceed the prescribed amount or the amount of reasonable cost recovery, where no amount is prescribed; and

“Whereas given no amount has been prescribed, the amount of ‘reasonable cost recovery’ has been left to the discretion of health information custodians; and

“Whereas in 2006 the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care proposed a regulation for fee enforcement under subsection 54(11) of the act; and

“Whereas in 2008 the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario ... submitted a recommendation for amendment of the act to include enactment of a fee regulation that is substantially similar to the regulation drafted by the ministry in 2006; and

“Whereas the IPCO’s recommendation is based on the numerous complaints from members of the public about fees charged by health information custodians for access to personal health records; and

“Whereas health information custodians continue to charge exorbitant fees for access to personal health records, against the recommendation of the IPCO; and

“Whereas the Center for Patient Protection recently cited this as one of the most common public complaints; and

“Whereas inaccessible fees continue to (1) be a widespread barrier to access of personal health records; (2) cause undue hardship and stress to the public; and

(3), inundate a tribunal that could otherwise allocate its resources to other matters.

1510

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

“That the government of Ontario enact the ministry’s ... fee regulation so as to enable hassle-free access to personal health records, as well as transparency and accountability of health care institutions.”

Of course, I affix my signature. I’ll give it to an usher to bring to the table.

CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition entitled “Support Conservation Authorities.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s 36 conservation authorities have developed a deep understanding of local ecosystems and have implemented a range of non-mandatory programs to best protect them; and

“Whereas these non-mandatory programs include water quality monitoring and improvement, tree planting and woodlot management, curriculum-based environmental education, trail development and outdoor recreation, support for local environmental initiatives and more; and

“Whereas it is unnecessary and prohibitive to require conservation authorities to secure MOUs with every municipality in their watershed in order to continue non-mandatory programs; and

“Whereas we are deeply concerned that stopping non-mandatory programs will adversely affect the health of our environment;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the continued delivery of the full range of programs and services that have been developed by conservation authorities, including programs and services that are not mandated by the province.”

I couldn’t agree more with this petition. I affix my signature, and I will send it to the Clerk.

FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

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

“Whereas the ban on hunting and trapping in sections of Ontario to protect the eastern hybrid wolf was put in place without regard for the overall ecosystem;

“Whereas this ban has adversely affected the ability of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR), hunters and trappers to properly manage animal populations and Ontario’s ecosystem;

“Whereas this ban is no longer needed and is in fact causing more damage to Ontario’s ecosystem and increasing unnecessary encounters between wildlife and Ontarians”—just ask anyone in Thornhill;

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

“That the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry immediately lift the ban on hunting and trapping set in place to protect the eastern hybrid wolf.”

I fully endorse this petition. I will sign my name to it and give it to the table.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Orchard Villa long-term-care home has the highest amount of deaths among seniors in Ontario during the COVID-19 pandemic;

“Whereas we believe the lack of staff, personal protective equipment and lack of staff training at the home during the government-mandated lockdown directly led to the high number of deaths among seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic;

“Whereas COVID-19-negative residents were not isolated from positive residents;

“Whereas the neglect and abuse towards residents at Orchard Villa LTCH directly resulted in their deaths;

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

“We, the families of Orchard Villa long-term care and the Orchard Villa Retirement Community and the public at large, demand a public inquiry, independent of the government of Ontario, into the practices, events and history of Orchard Villa long-term care, Orchard Villa Retirement Home and its owners, Southbridge Care Homes Inc. for the period of March 14, 2020, up to and including the end of the mandated lockdown, and the five years preceding March 14, 2020.”

I wholeheartedly support this. I affix my signature, and I will send it to the table.

FAMILY LAW

Mrs. Robin Martin: I have a petition on Bill 207, Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act, 2020.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas family law disputes in Ontario are often time-consuming and onerous matters for families involved; and

“Whereas the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act includes common-sense changes to simplify Ontario’s family law system, allowing parents and guardians to spend less time on paperwork and court appearances and more of their time making plans to support and care for their children; and

“Whereas, if passed, the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act would simplify and modernize the system, making it easier for families and loved ones to resolve disputes; and

“Whereas, if passed, Bill 207 would:

—make the family law appeals process clearer and easier to navigate;

—harmonize Ontario’s family laws with federal legislation, to make it easier for Ontarians to navigate the system and understand their rights;

—allow parents and caregivers to request certified copies of child support notices made by the online Child Support Service, so child support amounts can be more easily managed or enforced outside the province; and

—remove the requirement for family arbitrators to file arbitration award reports with the ministry, saving time and money;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario vote on and pass the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act.”

I fully support the petition. I will affix my signature and give it to the Clerk.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Jeannine Blais from Capreol in my riding for this petition, which reads as follows:

“MS Specialized Clinic in Sudbury.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“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;”

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

SMALL BUSINESS

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

“Whereas Ontario’s downtown businesses have experienced much of the negative economic impact of COVID-19; and

“Whereas our downtown businesses are small mom-and-pop shops, employ local citizens and invest in our communities; and

“Whereas our main street businesses have faced unique challenges through the COVID-19 pandemic; and

“Whereas in that same vein, these businesses face particular challenges such as costs associated with acquiring personal protective equipment and expanding their e-commerce capabilities; and

“Whereas if passed, the Main Street Recovery Act, 2020 would offer a grant of up to \$1,000 for eligible main street ... businesses, connect them with Ontario’s 47 small business enterprise centres, help them grow their businesses online, and establish Ontario’s small business

recovery web page to provide single-window access to small business supports;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario vote on and pass Bill 215, the Main Street Recovery Act.”

I fully endorse this petition and will sign my name to it.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. That concludes the time we have available for petitions this afternoon.

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 November 3, 2020, on the motion for third 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?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to put a few comments on the record regarding Bill 202, the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act.

I must start by telling the House that my father is a veteran of two wars, and our family has always been very grateful for the service he rendered to our country, as well as everybody else he served with. As he started to age—he's 87 years old now—he started to talk to me about his time in the Canadian Armed Forces and started to share some of the hardships that the people who went overseas with him had gone through.

1520

Things have not changed very much—you look at the number of young men and women who have gone to Afghanistan, only to often come back with multiple wounds. In my riding, there is Captain Kerr. He was in Afghanistan and, unfortunately, the vehicle he was in went over an artisanal bomb, and he has been a triple amputee ever since that accident happened. He lives in my riding. They have a beautiful farm with chickens and roosters and goats and horses, trying to make the best of it. But the adjustment was really difficult. For him, the wounds are obvious, but for many, many others, the wounds are not obvious. The one that we talked about the most is PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder. Post-traumatic stress disorder is an often severe mental illness. But I want everybody to know that this illness is treatable. With the right care, with the right support, you will get better, you will gain back your old self, and life will be happy again.

When we talk about the Soldiers' Aid Commission, it is one step towards helping all of the men and women who decided to go to the front, who decided to join the Armed Forces, who decided to fight for the freedom and liberty that we now have. As I said, when they come back, we

owe it to them to support them. This is what this bill will do in a very small part. As you know, Speaker, a lot of what the soldiers need when they come back should be provided by the federal government. They were employees of the federal government. They got their pay and danger pay from the federal government. But they are still Ontarians, and as Ontario, we owe them a debt of gratitude, just like every other Canadian. We have to make sure that they have the support they need. For many of them, if the mental health support, the mental health treatment, the mental health care that they need are not available, things start to spiral down and it goes from bad to worse.

Many of the people who have shared stories before will talk to you about the soldiers who come back. They have survived their tour in enemy territory only to come back to fight their own demons once they are back home. We often see that the first sign is the family breakup. When the person comes back, their spouses, their children, their parents, their siblings, their friends don't recognize them. This is how intense the disease can be. For many of them, as time goes on and they cannot see their way out of their mental illness, they take their own lives. This is horrible. This is preventable. We have to do better.

With the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, we, the province of Ontario, will make a little bit of money available to them, to the tune of \$2,000, to the tune of a few thousand dollars. But for someone who has lost all connection to their family, who has lost all connections to the people who supported them before, who loved them before, and find themselves with—the statistics speak for themselves: 17% of the homeless population in Toronto are people who have served for us in our Armed Forces, who were soldiers. The statistics repeat themselves throughout the province. Sudbury is no better. We have many, many young people who joined the Armed Forces, who were deployed, often more than one time. Some of them did not come back, and many of them came back with severe wounds, some of them that we couldn't see.

The aim of the act is to make sure that not only the people who fought in the war that my dad is a veteran from, but the people who fought in the most recent wars—the war in Afghanistan, the United Nations tours—that they also gain access. This is something that we could have done long ago, but we are doing it now, a little step in the right direction. But I would like it to be more than a little step, Speaker. I would like it to make sure that our mental health and addictions system is strong enough, robust enough to support them, to identify them, to reach out to them. Often, when members of the government respond to me that, “No, it's the federal government's responsibility to do this,” I say, “No, they are Ontarians. They are allowed access to our provincial health care system.” Health care is a provincial jurisdiction. It doesn't matter why you got sick. All that matters is that you are sick now. You have a mental illness. You have an addiction. You should gain access to the right treatment. But for many, many of them, it is not the case.

I want to thank some of the Legions in my riding for the phenomenal work that they do through the poppy fund. I

encourage everybody to go and buy a poppy every day. Put money in that box every day. It's money well spent. Get a brand new poppy in exchange and make sure that you support them. Our Legions are having a very tough time right now. For most of the Legions in my area, the poppy sale is what brings them most of the money that they use to help the soldiers returning, to help them with all sorts of issues that are directly related to the fact that they volunteer to help us, they volunteer to fight for us, they volunteer to protect us. And the Legions are there.

I have many Legions in my riding. I will start with the Legion in Capreol. I know that many of you have talked about good fish fries in your Legion, but I would be willing to make a little bit of a bet on this: that the fish fry in Capreol is pretty hard to beat. They also have a luncheon on Friday.

Interjections.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I see members on the other side who are willing to take my—

Mr. Michael Mantha: No, we're right here. We're not on the other side; we're right here.

M^{me} France Gélinas: —on both sides who are saying that they also have very good fish fries in their Legion. Okay. So maybe many of them have some very good ones; it's just that mine is the best. I'll end there.

This is how they used to bring money in for things like keeping the lights on, paying the insurance bill, paying the hydro bill, making renovations, keeping their hall going. Because of COVID-19, they were completely shut down for many, many months. Now that they have reopened, not all of the money-generating activities that they used to have are there. The Legion in Capreol is in a good monetary position right now, but how long could this go on? I am not sure. The \$83 million that the government made available to help is too limited in its mandate—it's only limited to help not-for-profit organizations and Legions to learn how to do fundraising. Let me tell you, the Legion in Capreol does not need anybody to show them how to do fundraising; they could probably teach a few of us how to do this. They do a very good job on their own, and they do a good job of supporting the young women and men who come back. Unfortunately, this year, they're not going to have a Remembrance Day celebration. They will be pre-laying the wreath at the cenotaph. They will have the honour guard march down to the cenotaph, which is in the centre of town, but they're not going to have their usual celebration.

1530

The next one is Falconbridge. Falconbridge also has a pretty good fish fry on Friday nights. They have a huge hall; I would say it holds hundreds of people. It's often packed, for two or three servings. This is how popular—this is where everybody in Falconbridge goes. They often have people who come not only from Falconbridge, but they come from Garson, they come from Coniston, they come from Skead. They all gather there. It's a good opportunity to get to see the people you know and have a good meal. They are quite fortunate that they are close to what used to be Falconbridge mine and now is—their

name just escaped me—in corporate nickel. Anyway, we still call them Falconbridge mine. They have helped them by renting their hall throughout COVID-19. I'm not sure if they always needed the hall, but they rented it anyway, which meant there was cash flow coming into the Legion, to make sure that they stayed open—because without the steady stream of revenue, it became really hard. They are also very good at helping soldiers with whatever their needs are. Some of them are in wheelchairs. Some of them need renovations to their houses. Some of them need access to mental health and addictions services. They are always willing to help any veterans in that area of my riding.

We also have a big Legion in Chelmsford. They just moved, actually. They were in a building that was not wheelchair-accessible etc. They moved to a new building in downtown Chelmsford. It's a little bit further to walk to the cenotaph, but it makes for a very nice parade. They're not going to have a parade and they're not going to have their regular Remembrance Day service this year because of COVID-19. When I first started as an MPP in 2007, it was mainly veterans of the First World War and Second World War as well as the Korean War and the Cold War. When you go to the service in Chelmsford now, you see a whole lot of young families; you see a lot of people pushing strollers and a lot of people with young children. The veterans are a whole lot younger than the veterans we have known for a long time. Again, Chelmsford is very good at supporting their veterans. Captain Kerr, who I talked about at the beginning, lives in Chelmsford, or just outside, and is being supported by that Legion.

I have another Legion, in Onaping-Levack. Again, they usually do a big celebration for November 11. In Onaping-Levack, the celebration is inside, which I sometimes very much appreciated—because even with my big winter boots and big winter coat and everything else on, some of the services get pretty cold on November 11 in Nickel Belt. The one in Onaping-Levack is inside. It is really cool. They always bring in children from the public schools, both the French and the English schools, and the children do a lot of singing. They show pictures of all of the veterans on the walls. That goes on while the laying-of-the-wreath ceremony is going on. Their service is always very different but always very nice, very well attended. I'm proud to say that they were the first Legion to have a wreath laid for trans people, and it happened in my riding. It was laid by Rita OLink, who is a trans person from that riding, in honour of all transgender soldiers who have died. This is something specific to that Legion. But again, this won't be happening.

The other legion is the Lockerby Legion. Lockerby is a whole lot closer to Sudbury. My riding goes all around Sudbury and then for hundreds of kilometres away from Sudbury. The one in Lockerby is the one that is the closest to the town of Sudbury. They also do a big service. I had hoped to buy my poppy mask from the Lockerby Legion, but when I went to pick them up, they were sold out. It had been a really good fundraiser for them.

I can tell you that it doesn't matter in which community of Nickel Belt that you do—oh, I forgot to talk about

Naughton and Lively. They also do a very nice service. There is a cadet corps in Naughton. The cadets are very much involved in the Remembrance Day service in Naughton. The cenotaph in Lively is just beautiful. It's on the corner of a street that has a school, two churches and a beautiful park, with the cenotaph in the park. Again, the Legion itself in Lively has closed, but we still do a service at the cenotaph in Lively.

It doesn't matter where you go throughout Nickel Belt; you will find kids who were with the cadets, you will find people who are with the reserves, you will find many families who have had loved ones who have been deployed overseas in our Armed Forces. The Soldiers' Aid Commission Act will be something that I will make sure I let all of them know is available to them.

But I cannot express enough how much the soldiers coming back from the old wars and from the new wars often have mental health and addictions issues, and often severe mental illness. They need access to good, strong, robust mental health and addictions care. Right now, we don't have this in Ontario. I wish that was in the bill, to guarantee them that Ontario would be there in their time of need—like we do for physical illness, we would also be there for mental illness and addictions. It's too bad it's not there, but it's still a good step.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We now have an opportunity for questions.

Mr. Dave Smith: This morning, we had an agreement with the NDP that debate on this bill would wrap up at 9:30. I cut my speech 12 minutes short. Why won't the NDP honour the agreement?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have absolutely no idea what the member is talking about. I was not part of any agreement. Usually, when there's an agreement, both parties would know, and I have no idea what we're talking about.
1540

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

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: I want to thank the member from Nickel Belt for her compassionate discussion of some of the veterans in her riding, who have come home from various conflicts overseas, and her discussion of the way that their wounds, sometimes invisible, have affected them.

I wonder if the member could expand on the kinds of ways that PTSD expresses itself and the barriers—both the barriers that they perceive and the actual barriers that are there—to their going to find help, and on how this bill might be improved to make that happen.

M^{me} France Gélinas: PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder, is a mental illness, and it can, like many other mental illnesses, run the gamut of being very mild and manageable with just deep breathing exercises and relaxation exercises, to needing intensive therapy. Sometimes you need to be admitted into the hospital to gain access to the therapy, the drugs and the support that you need. So it varies greatly. But it doesn't matter where on the spectrum you find yourself; what never changes is the discrimination against mental illness. A lot of people

are not able to come forward and say, "I need help," because they know full well that they will be judged because they are sick.

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

Hon. Bill Walker: I'm honoured to just be on the record a little bit on this bill and speak to the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act—making sure that we are always honouring our veterans, in any manner of service.

We are truly privileged and honoured to live in the greatest country in the world, the greatest province—and in my case, Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, the greatest community in the world. I revere our veterans, those who made the ultimate sacrifice, those who are with us today—and those who will fight for us tomorrow to defend those freedoms.

I know the member and I have done lots of things together, co-operatively. I think this is one of those bills that, frankly, there was no room for partisanship in—nor is there. I just want to make sure that we understand—and if she could explain a couple of the highlights of this bill that she's really proud of, that my colleague Minister Todd Smith, the member for Bay Quinte, has brought forward to honour all of our men and women of service.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Sure. Basically, the way it is now, the bill would allow the commission assistance to be expanded to veterans who are not covered by the bill. Right now, the veterans who are covered must have served in the Korean War or earlier, which means that 93% of the current veterans do not gain access to this service. The bill would increase eligibility to all veterans living in Ontario as well as their families. It's really to recognize that we have younger veterans. We've had wars since the Korean War, so we've had veterans from those most recent wars who would also qualify.

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

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you very much to the member from Nickel Belt—and also for our member from St. Catharines's hard work in fighting for our soldiers and our veterans.

We don't have a Legion in Toronto–St. Paul's, but very, very nearby we have the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 75 Fairbank. I just want to take a moment to thank them for their work. Whether it's a barbecue at the Legion, whether it's dancing or song, what I've come to know is that Legions are certainly places where people come together. They honour history, they honour civic duty, but they also think of how to build community outside when people return from their duty.

What I'm wondering is if the member may answer why this bill is so important, especially with regard to minor applications and major applications for assistance.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It has come to our attention that, unfortunately, a lot of our veterans will face hard times when they transition back to civilian life. Many of them end up facing mental illness, addiction. A high number of them end up living on the street, often with very few resources, very little money. The assistance will be there

to give them access to money. That cash can be used to pay first and last month's rent, so that they have a place to call their own, rather than being homeless; so that they have access to change, to make it feasible to maybe get a treatment that they don't have the money to pay for themselves. It would be up to \$2,000 that could be used, coming from the province, to help them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further questions.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I listened intently to the member from London–Fanshawe's debate today, and I wanted to thank her for her comments. But I just wanted to make sure that it's on record that the best fish fry of any Legion in Ontario is at the Osgoode Legion. Elizabeth McNee has done the best. The food tastes amazing. I will take your bet on that.

My question for the member is: If the NDP is in support of this really, really important piece of legislation, then why is this debate still continuing, and why aren't we moving forward to do what matters most and protect Ontario's veterans?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Back to the member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Speaker. Yes, I am the member from Nickel Belt, but I have nothing against the member from London–Fanshawe. She does a fantastic job.

I was happy to be able to put a few words on the record. As I mentioned, my dad is a veteran. Everything that has to do with veterans is very close to his heart. I know that he will be watching this.

Je devrais dire quelques mots en français, parce que mon papa préfère le français de beaucoup à l'anglais. Mon père est un vétéran et continue de l'être.

I will take the member up on her quest for the best fish fry. I think some of the fresh fish that comes from Wanapitei Lake in northern Ontario is pretty hard to beat.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Point of order, the member from Carleton.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I just want to correct the record and say that I meant to say "the member from Nickel Belt"—not London–Fanshawe. Sorry.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): It's always appropriate for a member to do a point of order. And if you need a judge to determine the fish fry business, just give me a call.

I turn to the member from Oshawa for the next question.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate the thoughtful comments from the member from Nickel Belt. Of course, she serves the province as the critic on health care issues, and so I value what she added to this debate about getting support to those veterans who need it, and whose responsibility it is to find the veterans and invite them to the services and make sure that they can connect, rather than just letting those in need hopefully navigate the channels themselves and find it.

I would ask the member if she could extrapolate a little bit: How can we connect with those in need? What role do the Legions play? What role could we, as legislators, play—and community members? Also, how can we support the Legions in that work?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I agree with the member: We all have a role to play. I'm pretty sure that most of us did not know about the Soldiers' Aid Commission before; now we all do. Most of our Legions do know about it because they have older veterans, but they will be really happy to know that now this commission and the money is also available for the younger veterans.

I would also encourage the government to make sure, throughout our mental health and addictions system, throughout our health care system, that people know that there's a little bit of money available to help our veterans if they find themselves in a situation.

I agree with you that the Legions have always had a huge role to play. They help each other out. They know who is a veteran. They reach out to each other.

1550

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

Hon. Bill Walker: It's truly a pleasure to speak to this bill in a little more detail. I have the utmost regard, sincere regard and reverence for all of our veterans, particularly those, as I said earlier in really brief remarks, who made that ultimate sacrifice, who gave us the privilege and the rights that we enjoy in this great country and province and our respective communities.

Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that those men and women who made that ultimate sacrifice did what we will always have a debt to repay to them. We all have our duty every day. We're all wearing the poppy, which is symbolic, of course, of November 11. But every single day, we should be giving thanks and we should be showing that respect by doing things like public service, like making sure we respect our fellow men and women in everything we do.

I'm grateful for a lot of the veterans, and I'm going to speak of just a couple in my riding.

Recently, a good, dear friend of mine—he was 104 years old; he would have been 105 but, sadly, didn't quite get there: Arthur Haley, who was a distinguished veteran in our community in Warton. He served in almost any charitable aspect you can think of and was one of those people who was a delight and positive right until the end. I recall a couple of years ago, at a Remembrance Day service in Warton, standing there—it was a miserable, cold, rainy, wet day. Mr. Haley, at that point, would have probably been 101, I think, or 102. He stood there the whole time at attention. He did not flinch. He did not expect anything. To me, it was just so symbolic of someone who did the right thing for his country and had so much pride. Again, I hope we'll all do that.

On November 5, Charlie Fisher from my riding is going to turn 106—again, a decorated veteran, a very spry gentleman. Sadly, because we have, of course, our responsibilities here and it's budget day, I will be here. But

I think they're doing a travelcade past him to show their respect and honour. He's a great guy.

Ted Johnston was a member of the Cape Croker First Nation community. Many people may not know this, but if you look at pure numbers, a lot of our First Nations communities put more of their men forward for the service, particularly in those days, significantly above the provincial average. I just taped a little addition for some of our folks back home to show our appreciation and respect for our First Nations who did more than their fair share during all of our wars.

I want to commend my colleague and friend the Honourable Todd Smith, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services and the member for Quinte, or Bay of Quinte—I always forget that one, now that it's a relatively new one—for taking on this task to make sure it came here. I know he has the Trenton base close to him. I have Meaford, of course, in my riding. We do a lot of things with our military. I think, in this case, he realized that there were some programs and services that were falling short, and he wanted to ensure that anyone who had served, whether it be in the Korean War, the Great War, World War II, or Afghanistan—anyone who has served and is a veteran and a soldier should have that ability. So I think this is a good piece of legislation.

In my riding—I tried to write them down real quickly; I hope I don't forget any of them—I am fortunate. Many people have spoken about it—this isn't really a prop in today's world, Speaker, but it is kind of appropriate that in today's world, with COVID-19, we're all wearing masks, and I put that on reverently to show my respect and support for all of our Legions; for our veterans; for our current soldiers, men and women; for the ladies' auxiliary, who in many of our Legions are the unsung heroes, doing their share to make sure our communities prosper and thrive even in trying times like this.

Starting at the tip of the Bruce Peninsula, the Tobermory Legion; the Swan Lake Lion's Head Legion; the Wiarton Legion; the Hepworth Shallow Lake Legion; the Chesley Legion; the Chatsworth Legion; the Tara Legion; the Paisley Legion; the Meaford Legion; the Durham Legion; the Hanover Legion; the Markdale Legion; the Flesherton Legion; and of course the Owen Sound, which is our biggest Legion in the area—all, of course, have those programs like we've heard, fish fries and dances and spaghetti dinners, and just do incredible work for our communities. It's one of those things—as you'll have the same challenge, I trust, Mr. Speaker, on November 11—it's hard to get to each of those communities for 11 o'clock, at that time. So some, again, go ahead of time; some, certainly, go a little behind from a timing and have a lunch or a dinner later that evening. I try to visit as many of those as I can. We have the ability, as well, to—one goes a week before, and I try to be there.

I believe that my colleague Mr. Calandra, the government House leader, has done great things in his community recently with banners. I know some of my municipalities, particularly small villages and towns, are doing that—they're putting banners up to show their

reverence for those veterans who have lost their lives, gave their lives many years ago for our benefit.

Mr. Speaker, I'm truly humbled that this will allow those veterans to have supports, to have programs to ensure that they have—it's a sad reality that each year, there are less and less of those living veterans who we can honour and pay homage to, who we can say thank you to not just on November 11, but every single day of the year. We will never, I believe, as long as people like you and me and all members in this House bring honour to them, forget their bravery and their sacrifice.

However, we also want to make sure that we celebrate and honour our current members of the military, our air cadets, the next generation coming up. I'm very humbled and honoured to get invitations, to be able to go and attend those types of ceremonies or the changing of the guard and just be part of that process, to encourage them, particularly the volunteer aspects, and to say, "This may be a career for you; it may not." Many people get very dedicated and spend lots of time.

This piece of legislation, I think, is going to be wonderful. I want to thank the commission's chair, Colin Rowe, who has spent a ton of time and energy and his own personal conviction, and the vice-chair, John Stapleton. They've spent 17 to 18 years, according to my colleague Mr. Smith, working on this. On behalf of Minister Smith, I'd like to also give a shout-out to other members of the commission: Homer Brooks, John C. Greenfield, Ken Osborne, Rosemarie McGuire, Susan Beharriell and William Thomas.

Again, all the members here, but I know specifically—you can see in Premier Ford's eyes how dedicated and how much of a huge supporter he is. He calls many people "champions," but I know when he speaks of our veterans, particularly our men and women in military service—and all of our emergency services, frankly, because we extend to all those people our true thanks and sincerity for what they do.

We've had huge opportunities to do many things, but this, I think, is one that needed to be done for a number of years. It was to be able to show that we are paying attention, that it was brought to our attention. It's been here, the commission itself—the Soldiers' Aid Commission is 105 years old, but what we've heard and what Minister Smith heard many times is that we must modernize. We must look to the new generation of men and women as we plan the next 105 years of the Soldiers' Aid Commission. We would be remiss if we didn't take the opportunity that is at our disposal to be able to do that—to show in action what we want to do, to make sure we allow that to happen and to move more benefits, to allow the opportunity for them to know that they're acknowledged, to know that they are respected, and that we certainly have all of that in-house, Mr. Speaker.

We want to make sure that those programs and services that they may not have even been aware of—I think one of the members here said that they may not have even been aware there was a Soldiers' Aid Commission, which I think, again, even in our capacities as MPPs—there are all

kinds of agencies and groups out there doing great things and we can't know all of them. So it is a great thing, I think, if there's even one member here, but more importantly, out in the community, who didn't know about the Soldiers' Aid Commission and will get behind it and give them their support, whether it be financial resources, their own time, getting involved or reaching out to a veteran and saying, "Are you even aware that there are programs and services that might be able to help you through this?" What we do know is that many people, when they come home from active service, don't always have all of the services that they are aware of—they may not even know they're entitled to certain programs and services, and I think this is one way we can show that.

Really, we want to make sure, at the end of the day, that those moms, those fathers, those sisters, those brothers, anyone in service knows how important—and sometimes we get caught up in life and we may take for granted just what it really means to serve, to put on that military uniform and go to service.

I had the privilege a couple of weekends ago—might be three or four now, Mr. Speaker—Corporal Thomas Mitchell from Owen Sound sadly was killed on an overseas mission in Afghanistan, and every year—and I give great kudos to retired veterans, the freedom riders, who actually make sure that every year that dedication is redone to show that respect and reverence to not only his honour and memory, but to that of his mom and dad and his siblings, his extended family.

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I have to share with you, I get goosebumps at each time I go to that, because it really puts you back in your steps to say, "There's a young man who gave willingly, knowingly." I know at the very first I think I went—his mom did a great job of sharing some personal aspects, and said, "If I die, I'm okay with that because that's what I do. I'm knowingly getting up because this means the world to me to be able to give that service to ensure that the generation coming behind will have the same rights, freedoms and privileges that I do."

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, this is another step forward to show our reverence, to show our respect, to show our gratitude, and I just would ask everyone that—let's treat every single day as Remembrance Day. Let's ensure that every single day, yes, we look at that poppy and we wear it with great pride and reverence. But every single day, with a veteran, with a current serving member and, as I say, the next generation, those youth cadets, those army cadets, those navy cadets, let's go to them and truly say, "Thank you for your service. Thank you for doing what you do, and thank you, at the end of the day, for allowing us to live," as I said earlier, "in the greatest country, in the greatest province, in the greatest community in the world."

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

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Thank you so much to the member opposite for the eloquent words. I know that the member would definitely agree that veterans, who have

given so much for their country, who have risked their lives, who have risked their health, who come home and who are having trouble coping because of their experiences deserve all of our help.

A frightening 13% of the people experiencing homelessness in Toronto alone are estimated to be veterans. I wonder if the member would agree that helping those people is so crucial. What other steps would the member propose in terms of additional mental health supports and additional help towards people experiencing homelessness so that we don't have so many veterans living on the streets—

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

Hon. Bill Walker: Thank you to the member for Beaches—East York for a great question. I think I'll start off by saying we're the first government and Premier Ford was the first Premier to actually appoint my colleague Minister Tibollo as a full-time mental health minister, to be laser-focused on that whole area.

With the federal government, there is significant mental health funding, billions of dollars, and I know that there is outreach, not just, frankly, to our veterans and to those people who have come home from fighting war on our behalf, but to every single person out there. There are great programs in my riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. Again, some funding has just been allotted, which will actually allow us to provide 24/7 mental health assessment, which has not been there before. It's one of the things you'll hear each of us in this House, particularly on this side, say every day. Every time we stand here, it's to find more money that is there for the programs and services, and not going into things like debt payments.

We are doing as much as we can. We'll continue. It is a focal point of this government, and again, I applaud Minister Tibollo for all of his efforts.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound for his speech. He's obviously very passionate about supporting our veterans, supporting those who have served, and certainly he talked a lot about the things that are special things going on in his community.

I know in Parry Sound, we have unique banners down the main street and in Huntsville. The mask I'm wearing today came from the Huntsville Legion, and the Bracebridge Legion is similarly doing that, so I would ask members to get their masks from their Legion if they can.

In this bill, there is mental health support. I was just looking for the member's opinion on the importance of having mental health services accessible through the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

Hon. Bill Walker: Thank you very much to the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka. They are proud of you, Norm, for all that you do, because you, every day, I believe, are an epitome of serving the people in your community, similar to those people who went to war for us and continue to go to war for us.

Mental health has become and needs to become a focal point not only of this government but every single government out there. I believe the Soldiers' Aid Commission will shine a light on things that we can do better. There's always room for improvement. We will never rest on our laurels, saying we've done enough. In fact, there are all kinds of things, as I alluded to earlier.

Minister Tibollo is actually moving forward with a lot of different initiatives. Sometimes what happens is, you inherit a situation, in this case a change of government, and things weren't maybe where we wanted them. So we need to take a good, hard look, and we'll use agencies like—we'll utilize and "work with" is a better word—to ensure that those things that are gaps in our system are identified. We'll work with them because they are the front line. They're passionate, they're caring and we'll work with them to find ways to implement programs and services to help.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to have the opportunity to ask the Associate Minister of Energy a quick question in response to his thoughtful comments about Legions and service clubs in his community. I suspect—and this is why I'm asking—that the member is hearing much the same as the rest of us are from their Legions, that they are in need of help and support, financial support, direct support, because while we are supporting—well, we're buying poppies and supporting the poppy campaign. That money supports veterans, but it does not go towards rent.

My question for you and for this government is, what would it mean to the Legions in his community to have that direct investment from the government to be able to keep their doors open? What would it mean also if, unfortunately, we lost the Legions across our community at the end of this pandemic?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you, and just before I return to the minister, could the crowd in the back please keep it down? You're interfering with the debate on the floor. Thank you very much.

I turn back to the Associate Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bill Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I can ask for a second indulgence, I'm going to also refer to my good colleague Minister Tibollo as the member from Vaughan–Woodbridge, because I know we're supposed to actually name them by riding and it just wasn't coming to me earlier.

To the member from Oshawa: a great question. I'll make a big pledge—I think every single person on this side and on that side, hopefully, would back it—that there is no way we're going to allow Legions to go out of business because of COVID. We have already put funding in place through community and social services to ensure we can help them. In my Ministry of Energy, we've lowered rates across the province so that people again can have less hardship going through this.

At the end of the day, I know our ministers have stepped up—the Minister of Finance, the Treasury Board, the

Premier and all of cabinet have stepped up to say that we know that all agencies, all organizations, all people, frankly, are having hardships through this. We're trying our best to bring money to the front line, to ensure we can get us through. What we really want to do is encourage people to get back to whatever sense of normalcy we can to get the economy thriving, so there's more money out there and we can actually ensure that those valued agencies and groups like our Legions, like the women's auxiliaries—

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

Hon. Bill Walker: —are always going to know they have a partner behind them—

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Speaker. I didn't know if I was going to get on there or not. Anyway, I'd like to thank the member for his impassioned remarks here a little earlier.

One thing I wanted to get on the record: I had the opportunity and great privilege in 2011 to go to Europe and do a tour of all the Commonwealth graves and see the kind of honour and the shape they keep those Commonwealth cemeteries in.

I got to go to the Menin Gate in Belgium. You being a history buff, you'll know that all the soldiers who served the Commonwealth in those two great wars, 1918 and again in World War II, their names were on the Menin Gate. They have a ceremony there every night—every night, not once a year, every night—at 8 o'clock, and the whole town comes to a halt and there are tourists there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): What is your question, please?

Mr. Robert Bailey: What would you have to say about the expanded mandate of the commission?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Back to the associate minister.

Hon. Bill Walker: Thank you very much to the member from Sarnia. I know how much you put into your community and how much, again, our veterans and our Legions and all of those service-type organizations mean to you.

I too had the privilege to travel to Vimy a few years ago. Again, it wasn't on government business; it was on my dime. I did it because I wanted to go. I was fortunate to be able to go with some other members through the True Patriot Love Foundation and saw some of those cemeteries and those gravesites and understood again what it really meant.

I know what we're doing on this side of the House is ensuring, with something like the Soldiers' Aid Commission, to show our support and our commitment and our dedication, to say that there are gaps. There are things we can do better, and we'll commit to working with those agencies wherever we can, to ensure that we're working efficiently and effectively with the people. It's always about the people, what services and programs the people are going to receive at the end of the day from that, and I

think this is symbolic and effective because we are stepping up, saying we're going to do it.

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

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Ms. Jill Andrew: It's always a pleasure to rise on behalf of our friends and community in Toronto—St. Paul's. I'm definitely in support of government Bill 202, the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act; however, as we have discussed here in debate, a real robust addressing of mental health supports is missing in this bill.

I would also like to ask the member from the government if they would be willing to ensure that veterans never lose their homes during COVID-19. Can we see something in here that protects veterans' homes, that protects our soldiers' homes, that protects their families' homes, from eviction during COVID-19? We need new legislation that stops evictions from happening. Will the government consider adding that to their bill?

Hon. Bill Walker: Thank you very much to the member from Toronto—St. Paul's. Speaker, I'm proud to stand here. Again, I'm going to give kudos to the person who deserves it, the member from Vaughan—Woodbridge. We have invested \$174 million in the first year of our mandate. In our second year we're investing \$350 million, and we'll continue to do things. My good colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, again, is doing great things across this province to ensure that we can get more housing built, and we want to continue to do that.

You'll hear me, every time I get a chance to speak, Mr. Speaker—we are going to be emphatic about getting the debt and deficit down whenever we can, because that money that's now going to interest payments could go to things like housing, like the member for St. Paul's always brings up.

So Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of what we're doing with the Soldiers' Aid Commission. We'll always work with them, and we'll always say thank you, and a debt of gratitude will never be repaid to our veterans and those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's always a pleasure to join the debate, especially on a piece of legislation like Bill 202. I was prepared to come and speak to Bill 207 today, the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act. There's a lot of interest in that particular piece of legislation. But I'm very pleased, actually, to talk about what's happening with Bill 202, the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, 2020.

Before I get into the actual legislation for this third reading debate on this bill, I do want to say, like many MPPs across the province, I joined my local Legion, Branch 530, on Friday for the launch of the poppy fund and the month-long advocacy that we try to do for veterans across the province. I have to say, there's a lot of concern out there on behalf of veterans in Ontario.

Listen, this past Friday, I attended the ceremony. I was very touched, actually. Of course, we haven't seen these veterans for many, many months. A lot of them were

feeling really quite lonely, and that isolation piece was quite powerful. So even though it was cold and we were outside, we took the time to actually just have conversations. That community that Legions build here in Ontario is really missed by our veterans and by the veteran community.

They're very concerned about not raising enough money this year to actually be viable. Branch 530 is in a fairly good position, but as I mentioned, they're a community of Legions, and they definitely are worried about not being able to go to the malls, go to the churches, go to the schools and make sure that some funds come in to local Legions.

And it's impossible for me to not talk about the Soldiers' Aid Commission without talking about my friend Don Balcarras, who was a World War II veteran who passed away about a year and a half ago. At his funeral—I will never forget it, because his sons heard for the first time at his funeral of some of the bravery and the acts of courage that he went through in World War II when his sons had always asked him for those stories. I think that an important piece of the history that those stories actually provide is that—he said to his sons, “I don't talk about the war because I went through it so you don't have to experience it, so you don't have to know how painful that stuff was.” It's a deep sort of love, I think, that in this case Don Balcarras had for his children. He went to war, he went through those experiences, and he came home and built a life as part of a community in Waterloo so that his family didn't have to experience the pain of war, actually.

It's also impossible for me to not talk about Bill 202, the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, without thanking our critic on this, the member from St. Catharines, Jennie Stevens, who, as I mentioned in second reading, when she stands in the House and she talks about our veterans and our military personnel, the men and women who enter the service, how honourable that path is for them—because her son, of course, is such a successful and committed member of the military, it's impossible not to be touched by her sense of pride that her son has been so successful in this career.

I also want to commend the member from Windsor—Tecumseh. He brought forward an amazing motion not that long ago that asked that the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario should ensure that its current review of charitable gaming regulations includes consideration of the need for Royal Canadian Legion branches and service clubs to raise funds to maintain their social and financial vitality by using local 50/50 and progressive draws. I know that my Legion, in particular, was very encouraged to hear that not only did this motion pass, as you would know, Speaker, but the AGCO also confirmed that Legions can move forward with raising funds.

Listen, they are in dire straits, and many people—we have this conversation maybe once a year: what the poppy fund actually provides to local Legions and even service clubs and veterans, and that those funds have been filling a gap for a long time.

So I'm happy that Bill 202 is actually at third reading, because this is a hopeful moment, I think, for us, that this

actually may happen. It certainly should happen. So I actually do want to congratulate the member from Windsor–Tecumseh for that. That was welcome news by the Legions and across the province.

I also want to thank MPP Stevens from St. Catharines for her work and her dedication to her role as our critic on this and her commitment to make life better for veterans and for military personnel.

For those of you who are just joining this debate, which probably just includes my mother and my neighbour down the road, the issue with the Soldiers' Aid Commission is long-standing. I mean, this piece of legislation has not been updated for over 50 years. The bill modernizes the enabling legislation governing the Soldiers' Aid Commission, which for more than a century has provided emergency aid to veterans and their families living in Ontario. Importantly, the bill allows the LG to prescribe eligibility criteria for assistance, but it left out younger veterans. It left out those who served, for instance, in Korea and some peacekeeping missions. Of course, all of us understand the importance of expanding the eligibility for this, but also formalizing the process.

The government has announced plans to expand eligibility to all veterans living in Ontario and their families. I have to say, we've been pushing for this for years now. I've been here for eight years; it's a long-standing issue. When this bill does become law, that will be a good day for the province of Ontario.

The goals of the commission are to administer the aid program, review and approve applications for assistance, and to provide advice on matters affecting veterans and their families. The commission consists of between three and 11 volunteer board directors appointed by the LG in C, in cabinet, for terms of up to three years. There's the definition of "veteran" and "family member," and there's a role around prescribing the amount of the assistance.

The bill provides a much-needed update to the commission's enabling legislation, which, as I mentioned, hasn't been updated since 1970, so it is long past due. In fact, we should be a little bit embarrassed that it has taken this long, but it has taken a lot of effort to actually get it to this place in the Ontario Legislature.

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The update will enable regulations to extend eligibility to all Ontario veterans and their family members, as our critic has repeatedly called for. At the moment, about 93% of Ontario's 230,000 veterans are ineligible for this assistance. This is a gap that needs to be fixed. However, this is just enabling legislation. The bill itself changes not too much, which is unfortunate. The actual effectiveness of the commission will depend on the government of the day and the regulations. And so while it is very heartening and encouraging that we are here at third reading, the work will continue when it becomes law.

For me, as the former finance critic—and now economic development—I like to follow the money. Where is the money going? In 2018-19, over 70% of the commission's funding was unspent, apparently due to the shrinking number of eligible veterans. Now that we have increased

the eligibility, one would think that more veterans may be able to access this financial assistance—but the money also has to be corresponding. If we are going to say, "Okay, veterans, military personnel who have come back, who have served abroad, the commission has been updated, it has been modernized," the money must be there for them when they have the courage to ask for help. I think that we can all agree on that component.

We do know that in March 2019, Global News reported on the exclusion of the vast majority of veterans from commission assistance. At the time, a spokesperson for the then minister said, "We are currently exploring opportunities to strengthen our government's supports for Canadian veterans to make a more meaningful impact." By Remembrance Day of that year, Global News had reported that no apparent progress had been made.

Sometimes—and I think I speak for a number of us here who have been here for a while—it is a slow process to move laws forward. But when the government wants to move their agenda forward, it doesn't actually take that long. That's a pattern that we saw with the Liberal government before them.

When our critic came forward and she—I remember the day very clearly. She stood in her place, she raised the issue of the unspent funding, of the ineligible veterans who were not able to access some financial assistance, and she said to the government, "Will the Premier stop treating most of today's veterans as second-class and extend this program to all who have served?" That is the goal here today at third reading of Bill 202.

When you go through the audited reports and the annual reports of the commission, there still seem to be some grey areas here. In 2018-19, there were 58 veterans who applied for funding; only 53 of those applications were approved, to the tune of only \$73,000. So unspent from 2018-19—71.1% of the funding did not go to veterans. This is something that I want to put on the radar for the government. As we move forward, we have to make sure, as I've said, that every veteran, every military personnel who has served this country and come back to the province of Ontario, when they have that courage, when they have that need and when they finally come forward and say, "I require some assistance," that in no way, shape or form should they be denied. That's a go-forward concern that some of us have in this House and I want to put it on the record.

I think as we are quickly approaching Remembrance Day, which some members have already said is going to look very different this year than in other years—it's one of those days when we have this solemn responsibility to lay that wreath on behalf of the province of Ontario. I remember the first time I did that, and the weight and the responsibility of that was very clear to me. That's likely because my family has served in the military.

My grandfather Ernest Morgan was a Second World War veteran, and he came back to Napanee, Ontario, the Kingston area. I know that there was financial strain, I know that there were financial issues, because there was never a follow-through, if you will, on the part of the army.

While that was perhaps accepted in that time of our history—and that sort of sponsored the whole beginning of the Soldiers' Aid Commission. Now it's going to be formalized, which is a good thing.

I think that we have a responsibility, as legislators, as those who make laws in the province of Ontario, to make laws that serve the people we serve, not some special interests. I believe very strongly that we have rights and responsibilities to actually follow through on that—and I think that's why this matters more than ever, given where we are in our history and given how democracies across the world have become very vulnerable.

I won't be the only one, I'm sure, in this Legislature who will be watching the election to the south tonight very closely. If you want to know how fragile a democracy is, just look to the south. Also, remember how important it is to elect individuals who share the principles of the people they serve and who won't disparage the citizens they're elected to serve, who won't brag about sexually assaulting women, who won't disparage veterans and be dismissive of that kind of service. I think there's a lot riding on that election tonight, and I'm really hopeful that I won't be as disappointed as I was four years ago, Mr. Speaker.

We are blessed in this country and in this province, and I certainly will acknowledge the privilege that I have had as a citizen and the access to education and to health care. In many respects, having a strong family and friends has helped me get to the very place that I hold right now. With that responsibility and with that position of power comes an ethical responsibility, a moral responsibility, if you will, to ensure that we take care of the most vulnerable people in our society. It is a weight, and there is emotional labour to it, but it is, for many of us, definitely a calling to service.

Our blessings and our freedoms are being brought into clear focus, I believe, so I'm very happy to have this moment in time in this province to reflect on how fortunate we are. We do see shifting governments and shifting and extreme ideologies and, really, growing divisiveness. I raised this even from an economic perspective when I was talking about Bills 213, 215 and 218—there's this K economy. The economic modelling right now is not showing a V, where we're recovering; it's not a W, where we're recovering; it's a K. It means that those who were doing well are continuing to do well. In fact, some of them are doing more than well, and they're benefiting from the state of crisis. But then there's a whole segment of the population that is experiencing this COVID-19 crisis with great pain and anguish. That disparity is worrisome, because if we really are all in this together, then we have to make sure that everyone has that shared possibility and potential to reach economic equality. That certainly is not the state of affairs right now in the province of Ontario, so we have a lot of work before us.

There has been a lot of talk in this House about rights and responsibilities. There's a whole generation—when these processions happen where people insist that they don't have to wear masks because it's their constitutional right to not wear a mask, it's a lost opportunity to

understand that, when one person gets sick—if COVID-19 has taught us anything, it's that we have a shared experience, in that when people get sick and there are no precautions or there are no safety regulations, then the most affluent, the rich, the poor—there's no line here. I'm thinking of veterans who went to war when they were 18- and 19-year-olds. They went and experienced the hell of war. Our 18- and 19-year-olds today just need to wear a mask, Mr. Speaker. It's an important comparison to make.

1630

Last week, I was incredibly upset at the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston because he hosted an unmasked social behind Queen's Park. I believe there's a responsibility that we hold as legislators to actually follow public health guidelines, to not be irresponsible with the power and the influence that we have, and to do our best each and every day. Hosting an unmasked social is not leadership; in fact, I would argue, it's just the opposite.

I want to thank the member from Oshawa for sharing the letter that she wrote to the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries and the Premier's office asking for financial support for Legions and service clubs. They are vital parts of our community. Passing the Soldiers' Aid Commission Act, Bill 202, will hopefully be one other avenue for financial support that veterans and military personnel have. Like her, I am a Legion member, and I'm an honorary member of a number of local service clubs. I'm proud, as I've said, about my family's legacy of service. She wrote, "None of us would have been free to stand for democratic election had many before us not fought and served for a strong and free Canada, where we can shape our own futures. As we near Remembrance Day, we should remember service and sacrifice, veterans and service clubs; not forget them."

That's a good way to end this debate. I look forward, of course, to the questions and comments from my colleagues from across the House. I also look forward to the passing of Bill 202. It is long overdue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for questions and comments. I turn to the member from Whitby.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I thank the member from Waterloo for her presentation.

Yes, there are many areas where we've expanded the eligibility requirements, but one in particular stands out, and that's the employment readiness aspect, particularly as it relates to younger veterans, particularly from Afghanistan. It provides them with coaching, a clothing allowance and other aspects to prepare them for job interviews and return them to the type of life that they aspire to. Speaker, through you: Can the member from Waterloo speak about the effect of that provision within the legislation in her riding?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you for the question.

The issue of employment and retraining is incredibly important. We all read the same articles last March about a veteran who had returned and he and his family were living in a tent. He was experiencing some mental health issues, financial issues. So investing in those who have invested in us, as a society, is always a good idea.

I raised the financial component in the 20 minutes that I spoke only because we have to make sure that there is truly accountability and transparency in how that money is being spent, who is getting it—and an important question is, why are some people being denied?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I turn to the member from Beaches—East York.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Thank you so much to the member from Waterloo for her thoughtful comments.

I'd like to continue on the question that was raised by the member opposite. The issue with somebody who has seen unspeakable horrors and is living in a tent and trying to put their life back together is not going to be solved by a new set of clothes or some job retraining. What they need is—the issues are so compounded. I was in a meeting yesterday with folks who deal with homelessness for the city of Toronto, and they were talking about the deep mental health supports that need to be there.

This is obviously a fabulous step in the right direction. We support this bill wholeheartedly. But what other meaningful steps need to be there in terms of mental health supports, in terms of affordable housing, so that we can help people get from a tent back into the working world and having their lives back together?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Beaches—East York for the question.

I know that housing is top of mind for many of us, because when calls come in to our constituency offices, sometimes we can only reflect them back to a waiting list, if you will. That is no different for veterans and military personnel who come back to the province of Ontario. They're facing mental health issues, financial issues and then the affordability issues of housing. So supportive housing is the key—and targeted.

I really do believe that if the government is truly committed to honouring the service of veterans and the duty that we all share to ensure that housing—which is the economic stabilizer. Without housing, it's really hard to get back on your feet, it's hard to access resources.

So I would say mental health and supportive housing combined—for veterans as they return to the province of Ontario.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: It is such a pleasure to stand and offer a few comments to this and ask a question to the member.

You touched on it earlier, in a lot of your debate and your comments you were bringing forward—that this is enabling legislation. A lot of it is going to depend on the will of the government of the day and the actual regulation that they're going to be bringing forward to act upon what is here. When I say the word “will,” I think of a lot of great people who are in the Legions back in my riding of Algoma—Manitoulin. I think about Russell and Vera Clearwater. I think about Chuck Myles. I think about Bob Manuel, Roy Eaton, Wayne Golden, Sally Hooke. These are all individuals who, each and every year, when it comes to this time of year—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pose your question, please.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to go back to the question. There's a big missing piece out of this legislation. Is the will going to be there to move this forward?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think our critic the member from St. Catharines has accurately identified some of the gaps that still exist. I know that this is something—and it's rare these days—we can actually all agree to move forward. I think the accountability piece that the member from Algoma—Manitoulin is trying to get to is an important part of it, and that's the checks and balances to make sure that where there is funding, it actually gets out the door. The maximum, I think, is \$2,000 per veteran—\$2,000 can go a long way for a person in crisis, but it's really crisis funding. So the goal is to create long-standing plans and strategies for veterans who are returning to Ontario.

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

Further debate? Further debate?

Ms. Dunlop has moved third reading of Bill 202, An Act to continue the Soldiers' Aid Commission.

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

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Orders of the day.

MOVING ONTARIO FAMILY LAW FORWARD ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 FAISANT AVANCER LE DROIT DE LA FAMILLE EN ONTARIO

Mr. Downey moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 207, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act, the Courts of Justice Act, the Family Law Act and other Acts respecting various family law matters / Projet de loi 207, Loi modifiant la Loi portant réforme du droit de l'enfance, la Loi sur les tribunaux judiciaires, la Loi sur le droit de la famille et d'autres lois en ce qui concerne diverses questions de droit de la famille.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I return to the Attorney General to kick off this portion of the debate.

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm honoured to rise in the House today for the third reading of the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act.

Before I begin, though, I would like to acknowledge and thank the many justice partners who have worked tirelessly during COVID-19, during the outbreak, to support and expand access to justice for thousands of families in Ontario. I would like to acknowledge, in particular, the Ontario Bar Association, the Federation of Ontario Law Associations, the Office of the Children's Lawyer, the Ontario Association of Child Protection Lawyers, the children's aid societies council, Legal Aid

Ontario, and all the practising lawyers on the front lines of family law throughout Ontario.

Similarly, I would like to thank the Family Dispute Resolution Institute of Ontario and the Ontario Association for Family Mediation, comprised of lawyers and other dispute resolution professionals, who work day after day helping Ontario's families navigate the justice system.

The staff at the Ministry of the Attorney General, who work in the justice system all over the province, have worked around the clock to maintain the integrity of our justice system and drive it forward. They have been resilient, they've adapted quickly and they've worked with the utmost professionalism under the most stressful of times. Thank you to our team.

1640

People rely on our justice system to address urgent matters in moments of tremendous stress and crisis, such as child protection proceedings and restraining orders. Thank you to our partners at the Superior Court of Justice and the Ontario Court of Justice and the front-line workers across our justice system who ensured that critical justice services were able to continue during the outbreak, and continue to be available as we deal with the impacts of COVID-19.

At the Ministry of the Attorney General, we've worked around the clock to ensure that justice not only remains accessible but that our justice system evolves and modernizes, and stays that way. We acted quickly to make investments in technology, from laptops to VPNs to conference lines, to quickly provide access to Zoom and other digital platforms, to allow the courts to transition to remote proceedings. Throughout the COVID-19 emergency and recovery, we've worked with our partners to move Ontario's justice system forward decades in a matter of months through ground-breaking modernization initiatives that have already changed the way Ontarians access and avail themselves of justice services.

To improve access to justice and reduce courthouse attendance, we've moved many services online and supported new ways of providing remote hearings. Ontarians don't need to visit the bank every day to do their finances, and they shouldn't have to visit a courthouse or a government office or a law office every time they want to manage their legal matters.

To improve access, we fast-tracked our legislation for online notaries and commissioners to allow Ontarians to sign documents and verify identities from the safety and convenience of their home or mobile device. The impact of this is significant, especially in rural areas, where distances are greater and sometimes weather even gets in the way of getting the job done.

We rolled out a new online court case search service to open up public access to information that people used to have to line up for at courthouses, and we passed an emergency order to allow virtual witnessing of wills and estates.

Documents for serving civil cases on the crown can now be filed by email, and just last week we announced that Ontarians dealing with small claims matters will be

able to submit and respond to documents by email in addition to the existing Small Claims Court online service. Again, I would like to highlight that we have expanded the number of civil and Family Court documents that can be filed online. We are now at over 450 such documents, and we're just getting started.

Ontarians can now set up or change child support payment arrangements online, and they can file for joint or civil divorce online as well.

Since March, the Superior Court of Justice has held over 50,000 virtual hearings, hearing these matters remotely, using video and teleconferencing. Just think of the scale of that: 50,000 hearings. If individuals had to come together, if there were only two individuals, that's 100,000 people that were affected in a positive way by the changes that we've made.

We're gradually rolling out, across Ontario, access to Thomson Reuters CaseLines, which is a document-sharing e-hearing platform that supports remote and in-person hearings. It is a game-changer for Ontario's courts. Now, a document-sharing platform doesn't sound that—it sounds like a Dropbox. It is much more sophisticated than that. It allows for different levels of security. It allows for the judge to control, if it's a child protection matter, whether documents are redacted. It really increases access to justice and the transparency of the court system in a way that has not been done before.

We built into the product an ability for the media and for third parties to be able to access things in a way that they couldn't before. They used to have to go to the courthouse and go to the counter and try to get copies and all that sort of thing. We're allowing access, an appropriate level of access, and judges will make most of those decisions. It's a very sophisticated product and it increases access to justice, and I look forward to the full roll-out.

The modern platform enables parties to an action and their lawyers to share documents of any size. They're available to those involved 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It's adapting to the way that we work. Some people work shift work; some people work weekends; some people work all the time, like the members of this House, Mr. Speaker. It's a major investment in the future of Ontario's courts. Ensuring justice services were available when needed has been critical for many Ontarians and businesses in these very difficult times. We've also made it possible to dispute traffic tickets and other provincial offences remotely by audio or video, where available.

Of course, our government had committed to modernizing our outdated justice system well before the COVID-19 outbreak. But these unprecedented challenges, Speaker, required an urgent new approach to old problems, and so far—to accomplish far more than we could have imagined.

Speaker, the days of watching our justice system fall behind are long gone. In responding to these unprecedented circumstances, our government has made bold and significant steps towards a smarter and stronger justice system, a system that we know will continue to evolve, improve and better serve our communities as we work together to get our province back on track.

The proposed Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act that we are debating today would build on this progress and reinforce our government's commitment to continue moving boldly towards a more accessible, responsive and resilient justice system.

This bill demonstrates our government's commitment to supporting families and children when they need it the most. Speaker, we know family disputes pose unique challenges in our justice system. As a government that is firmly committed to supporting children and families, we see family law as a priority. It deserves a thoughtful, informed and innovative focus. Frankly, Speaker, it's an area of law that previous governments made a conscious effort to ignore. This is an area of law where there are not always easy answers, nor quick fixes. These are matters that require careful consideration and political will to get things done. This government supports children and families as a priority, and we see no reason to delay the changes included in this bill that will make the system easier to understand, easier to navigate and easier to access.

Ontarians encounter the family law system in some of life's most difficult times, and our overly complex and outdated system has not historically helped to reduce the stress and anxiety Ontarians experience as they address their matters. The system can be better, and the system will be better. Our government is working to apply smart solutions, to strengthen the family justice system so it is more accessible and responsive. In short, we are proposing common-sense changes to allowing parents and guardians to spend less time on paperwork and less time in court. We want them spending more time caring for their children and more time on things that matter to them.

Before I continue, it should be noted that this government has already introduced many modern online services to help people resolve their family law issues outside of the courtroom. For example, we expanded the online service that allows spouses who agree on ending their marriage to file joint or simple divorce applications online. As part of our expansion of e-filing services available through Justice Services Online, care was taken to ensure access was improved in the family law sector. As a result of this deliberate approach, Ontarians are now able to file about 150 court documents online in any new or existing family proceeding in the Superior or the Ontario Courts of Justice.

I just want to pause there for a moment, Mr. Speaker, because this is significant. This is somebody who is going through a very difficult time of life and who no longer has to go to the courthouse, sometimes for the first time in their life, to file a document, to deal with what is often a foreign system. It's a system that people don't encounter until they're in a time of stress. By doing these things online, it allows for them to get assistance. It really is a game-changer in family law.

The government is focused on making the family justice system more accessible and easier to use. We need to act swiftly and make changes many thought impossible or would take years to accomplish. We pressed forward

together to keep Ontarians safe and to ensure that, even in the most difficult moments, they would know that justice would be done.

As a result of the historic collaboration and the ingenuity of so many dedicated professionals, I am confident that Ontario's justice system, including the family law sector, will emerge from this crisis more resilient and better prepared to respond to future challenges, better than ever before.

But the work is far from over, and there is broad consensus among all of our partners that we cannot go back to the way things were. Let me be clear: We are not going back. This is just the beginning. We must continue to innovate across the entire justice system. The justice system isn't just a courtroom. The justice system is the things you encounter on an everyday basis.

1650

Our government has spoken with front-line staff and many justice partners, and we have taken action to make a difference for Ontarians. Much of what we heard and learned from these discussions is reflected in the proposed legislation. We know the system will work better, and we are taking steps to move it forward. We didn't just sit down and come up with these ideas on our own, Mr. Speaker. We listened to people. We took the experiences of front-line workers, whether they be court staff or whether they be practitioners—I'll talk a little bit later about how we gathered some of that information. It was very broad and very comprehensive, listening and discussion and checking and rechecking to make sure we got it right.

Families and the legal community have told us many times that the system needs to be more accessible, responsive and resilient. That's why in July 2019, last year, my parliamentary assistant, Lindsey Park, led a review of family and civil legislation and processes across Ontario. The purpose of the review was to explore ways we could simplify family and civil court processes, reduce costs and delays for families and find pathways for earlier dispute resolutions. We wanted to find ways that were different. We wanted to find ways that weren't just a tweak on the same. We know that people have challenges in this area, and it's a very complex area.

Throughout the review, PA Park met with members of the legal community and the public across the province and listened to the stories of hundreds of Ontarians, including lawyers and legal professionals. We felt it was important to get their front-line perspective on how we could improve. Across the province, we asked how we could simplify unnecessarily complicated processes for those who interact with these parts of our justice system. We heard first-hand from many justice partners, front-line staff, business owners, families and lawyers about ways we could improve the system and the challenges that Ontarians have been experiencing. We heard about the incredibly challenging circumstances that many families face, which were being amplified through unnecessary court delays and excessive legal costs.

We are grateful for the ideas and the feedback we received. We've been hard at work developing a more

accessible, responsive and resilient system for families across the province. Their suggestions to improve family and civil legislation, regulations and processes are reflected in the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act that we're debating here today in the House. Their input was invaluable. Really, it's amazing when you sit down with people who have been doing things for a very long time. They know the answers. They just need an avenue; they need somebody to listen, and the number of times—

Miss Monique Taylor: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Excuse me. I'm sorry to interrupt the minister. The member for Hamilton Mountain has a point of order.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Speaker. I don't believe we have quorum.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Perhaps we'll do a quorum call. I believe it's the fourth time today that we've lost quorum.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Short): Quorum is not present.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Short): Quorum is now present.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I return to the Attorney General to continue the debate.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I gather we lost quorum because I look better on TV. They were all in the lobbies, watching the speech. Somebody sent me a note.

Ms. Catherine Fife: You're taller.

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm taller on TV. Yes, that's right. Yes, absolutely.

I was really just talking about the number of people who gave us practical input. The people often have an answer, but they don't know where to give the answer. I went through this experience before. My father drove trains for a living for 35 years, and so I can tell you every time they did a review of the railway, a lot of the engineers knew the answers to the questions, but nobody ever asked them. I grew up learning that people knew answers that nobody asked. Nobody asked them, the people who were on the front lines.

It was really important to me—in 2006, 2007, in that space, I was doing a review on the Trent-Severn Waterway for the federal government. It was an independent panel, the first independent panel since Sir John A. Macdonald's time on the Trent-Severn Waterway, and we were hearing from the public. We had 30 public meetings across the system, and we heard from thousands of people. But I said, "I want to talk to the people who actually turn the wheel on the lock. I want to talk to the people who are actually making the locks. I want to go to the shops. I want to talk to those people." And I got told, "Well, there are challenges. There's labour stuff and union stuff, and it's going to be difficult. You can't really do that." I said, "You can either set it up or I'm just going to go talk to them anyway," because I knew that they knew stuff.

We put together the meeting, and these front-line workers, these people who worked in the system every

day, some of them for decades—the best meeting I ever had. It gave us insight into how the system worked and how it could work better, some of the challenges. It really was valuable.

So I'm very dedicated to hearing from the people on the front line and having them tell us what they think. I can't tell you how many times I, and my parliamentary assistant as well, would hear from people saying, "Nobody has ever asked me before. Nobody has actually asked me for my opinion on this." We got some of those pieces, and that helps inform what is in this bill.

Among the things that we heard is that the government should continue doing something. Sometimes you continue things; sometimes you stop things; sometimes you change things. But we got told, "You should continue to urge the federal government to accelerate the expansion of the unified Family Court model throughout Ontario."

Unified Family Courts streamline Family Court processes by ensuring Ontario families have to go to one court to resolve their legal issues. Unified Family Courts help families going through difficult transitions by simplifying complex court processes, saving them time and money when they need it the most. The unified Family Court is a model where all family law issues, whether under provincial or federal legislation, are dealt with in one court.

We worked with the judiciary and our partners in the federal government, and in 2019, we expanded the unified Family Court model to eight more locations. Residents in Belleville, Picton, Pembroke, Kitchener, Welland, Simcoe, Cayuga and St. Thomas now have access to these courts. We've seen support from so many family law organizations for unified Family Court expansion, and we're proud to deliver them for them and for the clients they serve. More than half of Ontario residents are now living in regions with a unified Family Court. Before May 2019, there were only 17 UFCs in Ontario; now we have 25. This means more Ontario families can spend less time navigating confusing courts and legal processes.

In addition to the ones that I just mentioned that we expanded to, there are unified Family Courts in my riding of Barrie–Springwater–Oro–Medonte, Barrie–Innisfil, Bracebridge, Brockville, Cobourg, Cornwall, Hamilton, Kingston, Lindsay, London, L'Orignal, Napanee, Newmarket, Oshawa, Ottawa, Peterborough, Perth and St. Catharines.

Expanding the unified Family Court in Ontario continues to be a priority for this government. We know that for families who rely on the family law system, revolving matters in a timely fashion is critical. But more work needs to be done. We would like to see the model in 100% of our court locations.

I thank all those who have been involved in expanding the program thus far at the federal and provincial level, because this is something that takes co-operation from Minister Lametti in terms of appointing judges. There's a process and ongoing dialogue, something that I have spoken with him about several times. The contributions of everybody working on this initiative go a long way to expanding the unified Family Court system in Ontario.

Speaker, the more we know about family law systems, the more we are convinced that people shouldn't be required to navigate a complex and outdated justice system during the most difficult time of their lives. That is why our government continues to take steps to provide options for families to resolve their family law issues without having to go before a judge.

Quite honestly, in my experience and practice and my law partner's practice, people have a general idea of where they're going to go through a separation or a divorce. The process can be heart-wrenching. It can be very difficult. And that's with the assistance of a lawyer. We'll talk about what's really happening out there on the ground and people in conflict—understanding that is why our government continues to take steps to provide options for the families, to resolve them earlier without going before a judge. We want to make sure that the experience minimizes conflict as much as possible.

1700

The family law system draws a large number of self-represented litigants, and the numbers keep going up; I mentioned in second reading that somewhere between 50% and 70% are self-represented. That's a significant number. So we need to build our systems and our rules and our regulations for that reality. We can't expect those 50% to 70% to all of a sudden get somebody who can be a Sherpa to navigate the system for them and with them. Where they turn, quite often, when they don't know where else to turn and they get in front of a judge, is to the judge. It's an extraordinarily difficult position for a judge to be put in. Judges can't act as counsel for self-represented litigants as individuals, and they have to make sure, at the same time, that justice is done and that the law is applied appropriately as the cases wind their way through the system.

Speaker, today, I also want to talk about an important non-legislative initiative—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I apologize. I just have to ask the people in the back to keep their voices down, because they're interfering with me being able to hear you. What you're saying is very important.

I return to the Attorney General and just hope they keep the noise down in the back.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just tuning them out, as sometimes happens. I'm glad that you're listening to what I have to say, because I really do believe in it. I really think that it's important.

For the people of Ontario who are self-represented litigants, who come before a judge who has to balance getting an appropriate outcome with people who don't know how to navigate the system—it's really a difficult position for them to be put in. We want to help people resolve their disputes faster and with less conflict, but we also want to help alleviate the growing pressure on judges.

Our government has been working with the Superior Court of Justice to expand the dispute resolution officer program. Through this program, people involved in family

proceedings are provided an early evaluation of their case by a neutral third party. Dispute resolution officers are senior family lawyers who are appointed to conduct family case conferences. A dispute resolution officer can help families identify and narrow the issues in their case or in their matters and facilitate an earlier settlement. I'll use a medical analogy: The earlier that you can attend to something, the quicker it will heal. If you have a cut and you leave it unattended for a very long time, complications happen and other things arise that would not have arisen had you dealt with it earlier. The dispute resolution officer is exactly that. They help them attend to what's most important in that time and ideally avoid other issues that don't need to come up, just through the passage of time.

In locations where the dispute resolution officer program is offered, the first request to change an existing Family Court order will come before a DRO rather than a judge. It's a little less confrontational, it might be a little more informational, and ideally, it helps them reach resolution. DROs mainly deal with requests to change existing child and spousal support orders. That's a big, big area. As some of you may know, spousal support and child support have guidance. There are some charts, federal standards and whatnot, so that there is some predictability to it. A DRO knows what the ranges are and what's possible. People will sometimes come with an idea because they were told by somebody else, and it's not fully informed or in the right context. A DRO will help them put it in context and come to some resolution that they both understand and both will live with. The DRO will then meet with the parties—so before the judge—determine their issues and explore settlement options.

The program is currently operating in Toronto and, again, my riding of Barrie; it's in Brampton—which has the busiest courthouse in Canada—Durham, Milton, Newmarket, Hamilton, London and St. Catharines. I'm proud to share that we are extending the DRO program to two new locations: Kitchener and Welland.

The program builds on our government's commitment to help families resolve their matters more quickly and easily.

I would like to thank our partners in the Superior Court of Justice for their support on this important initiative. I look forward to our continued work together as we continue to explore, as we are now, other court locations that may benefit from the program. It's an ongoing collaboration. It does take partnership, both with the practising bar, with the courts and all of our partners.

The system is so complicated, Mr. Speaker, that, really, it's not up to one person to fix, but it is up to this government to provide leadership and to bring people to the table to talk about what we heard from practitioners in the field. I'm really pleased that we were able to do that and bring forward what's happening in this bill.

Our government has made it our mission to cut red tape not only for businesses and jobs, but for all Ontarians. The Premier appointed an Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction. I'm proud to stand in the House with Minister—I can't say his name; I got told

by the Speaker. The Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction is doing a phenomenal job, and our government has rallied around his leadership. His persistent and creative approach to fixing issues for people has changed the way the provincial government approaches obstacles that cost Ontarians valuable time and money.

Part of our work to move family law forward involves removing outdated processes that can delay family law professionals and, ultimately and most importantly, their clients. One of our greatest allies when it comes to resolving family law matters quickly and efficiently are family arbitrators. Family arbitrators can be asked to help resolve many kinds of family disputes, such as the support of a spouse or child, or both. They're also asked to help resolve disputes related to the custody of children or property matters. A family arbitrator can provide a less stressful, less expensive and less confrontational alternative to the Family Court system. Their work can reduce the burden on our Family Court system and on families. That's why we've cut through the red tape to make their jobs more efficient.

Speaker, there was an unnecessary requirement—I would say unnecessary currently; at the time, I think it was a good idea. But the time has come that we move past this idea that an arbitrator had to submit a report to the Ministry of the Attorney General on a biannual basis. This report outlined details of each and every family arbitration, every decision they made. I'll go back in time, because I don't think it was a bad idea in the beginning, because we needed data to understand how the system was working—but we're many years later, and they're still being filed. I don't think anybody is really making use of them, and it has turned into red tape. Sometimes something starts as a good idea and it turns into red tape. Well, we're looking at everything to find and cut those pieces of red tape. These reports included the date and length of hearings, the matters being addressed, the age or length of relationship, the income, total value of assets, information on children, spousal supports—I'm not even sure I have time to tell you all the things that were required in this report. Quite simply, the reports were not an effective use of a family arbitrator's time. They took time and attention away from more pressing matters that make up the family law sector. Our family law system will be better served by removing the extra and unnecessary reporting requirement and freeing up those resources to focus on what matters most: Ontario's families and children. After all, reducing this burden for family law arbitrators also reduces the burden on our front-line staff who are receiving and filing these reports. What's more, Ontario was the only jurisdiction where this kind of report was required. We've eliminated the burdensome requirement, to allow family arbitrators to focus on what matters most: helping families navigate their legal matters as simply and as quickly as possible.

Since being elected, our government has worked non-stop to cut unnecessary red tape that makes life more difficult for those who deliver essential services to our communities.

Before I discuss the changes in this bill, I want to highlight some of the important work that has been completed up to this point to provide more access to online services for family matters.

The ministry continues to expand online services to enable Ontarians to file Family Court documents, as I said earlier, any time, 24-7, without having to visit a courthouse or wait in line.

After a successful pilot period, Family Claims Online, launched province-wide in November 2018, enabled Ontarians to file joint divorce applications online with the Superior Court of Justice, including custody and access and support claims, on consent.

On February 25, 2019, a mere few months later, the ministry expanded the online filing system to enable Ontarians to initiate simple divorce applications online at any time. The existing joint divorce online filing process was also enhanced to permit property claims, on consent.

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On August 5 of this year, the ministry launched a new online filing service province-wide. It's called Family Submissions Online. As I mentioned earlier, the new service makes it possible for Ontarians to electronically file about 150 court documents in any new or existing family proceeding in the Superior Court of Justice or the Ontario Court of Justice. Users can pay court filing fees online securely by credit or debit card and maintain a record of their online filings. Individuals can also request a fee waiver certificate or submit documents with an existing fee waiver certificate. There are instances where people aren't required to make that payment, and so we've maintained that as an access-to-justice matter. I can tell you, it sounds simple—I kind of glossed over it. You can pay online with your credit card—well, that wasn't happening in our system; it just wasn't built for it. And yet I can go on my phone and I can buy all sorts of things and pay by credit card—my phone remembers my credit card, for crying out loud. But I couldn't file a court document and pay for it online; well, I can now.

The ministry has also partnered with CLEO, Community Legal Education Ontario, to develop Guided Pathways for Family Court forms—which is an online interactive tool that helps Ontarians complete their court forms easily and accurately to resolve their family law matters. These are Guided Pathways; there is online help to help you understand the terminology, to help you understand what the forms are for, to help you understand which forms you might need. The tool will ask users a series of plain-language questions, and it uses their answers to populate the applicable court forms and generate a next-steps checklist—simple things like, were you married or were you common-law? It's asking questions to make sure you go down the right path. These forms may then be filed online or in a courthouse once you've gone through them. It's a complimentary online service.

We aim to modernize the Ontario family justice system by providing these simpler, faster and smarter processes for resolving family law issues.

Speaker, as I mentioned, we are making great strides to improve the family law system for many of its participants, including for parents and caregivers. One particular example I'd like to highlight today for the members in the House is our online Child Support Service. As you know, Mr. Speaker, in 2016, the Ministry of the Attorney General introduced an easy-to-use online Child Support Service that makes it easier and faster for families to set up or change child support payments without having to go to court. This has been an ongoing initiative that allows parents and caregivers to spend less time completing court documents and avoid having to spend time in an adversarial court system or even just the environment. It frees up court resources to address more complex and urgent family law matters, such as cases involving child protection. I'm pleased to tell you that we are proposing improvements to that service with the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act. Our proposed legislation would address an issue where someone who uses our online Child Support Service and is required to get certified copies of their support payment notices that were issued by the service—the requirement comes up most often when a parent or caregiver wishes to enforce new or changing child support from outside of Ontario, from outside of the province. Parents outside of the province need a certified copy of the support notice in order for it to be enforced. The Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act would provide a way for parents and caregivers to obtain those certified copies of the child support notices that are issued through the online Child Support Service so they can manage or enforce their amounts outside of Ontario. We're increasingly mobile as a society, and this just makes good sense. Access to justice and access to the services families need in difficult times should not depend on where they're located. Our proposal to make sure parents and caregivers have the supports they need is another step towards making family law and the family justice system easier to navigate, faster and more accessible. I'm very proud that our government is proposing changes to this tool so parents can request and receive certified copies of support payment notices directly from the online service. This change supports one of the main goals of this bill: to allow parents to spend less time on cumbersome procedures and paperwork and more time providing care and support for their families and children.

Throughout the many changes I've introduced as Attorney General, I have always looked at ways to modernize the system. Continuously, I'm looking for ways to bring the justice system in Ontario to the leading edge across Canada and worldwide. This work to bring the justice system into the 21st century is again brought to bear in this legislation we are debating today. Our changes to the online Child Support Service are just one example of many modernization initiatives in this bill.

Speaker, the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act aims to simplify another unnecessarily confusing process: filing family appeals. The current path to filing family appeals is complicated and very unclear. Three different courts hear family cases in Ontario: the Ontario Court of

Justice, the Superior Court of Justice, and the Family Court branch of the Superior Court of Justice. That's confusing enough. That's what the unified Family Court is trying to tackle—but that is the case in half of Ontario. If that's not confusing enough, each of the three courts has a different route of appeal. It's a foreign world for most people who enter it in a time of crisis, in a time of stress. They have to figure out which court to go to, and then if they have to appeal, they have to take different routes to appeal a case. Depending on the courts, it can make it difficult for even lawyers to determine where to appeal a matter, and we know that a significant number of the people navigating the family justice system are representing themselves without the help of a lawyer. The current system is not accessible. That is why we have proposed to fix this for Ontarians. To make the family law appeal system easier to navigate, the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act proposes amendments to the Courts of Justice Act to make it easier to understand the appeal routes for family law cases. These proposed changes will help Ontarians, lawyers included, to better understand the family law appeal process and, ultimately, help them reach their final decisions faster and more predictably. This common-sense proposal, if passed, would make it easier for parents to understand where to appeal their cases, regardless of where the matter is heard.

Our justice sector partners have told us that the family law appeals process needs to better balance and promote access to justice; I could not agree more. That's why we listened when we heard concerns at committee about one of our proposed changes to the family law appeal routes for child protection cases. Our stakeholders at committee objected to an existing requirement for the permission of the court to hold a second appeal at the Ontario Court of Appeal for child protection matters first heard in unified Family Court. What that means is, you had to go and ask permission to be able to appeal it in a child protection matter, at the second level of appeal. We heard the requirements were adding yet another layer in a highly charged and time-sensitive process. Our stakeholders told us that because of the significant issues at stake for parents and families, it was critical to have maximum access to the highest appeal court in the province. We listened, and we took note. We put something forward. We heard from the stakeholders at committee, and we changed it. In response, we put forward two motions that would simplify and increase access to the appeal process even further so that there would be no need to get the court's permission to bring an appeal to the Ontario Court of Appeal for child protection cases—no matter which court they were first heard in, no matter the geography of where the case is taking place.

Our government has not stopped listening to the people on the ground who intimately know how the family law system in Ontario can be improved—from our initial consultations right through the process. I'm happy to say that our family justice stakeholders—including the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, the Office of the Children's Lawyer, the Ontario Association

of Child Protection Lawyers, the Ontario Bar Association, the Federation of Ontario Law Associations—and the courts are all supportive of these amendments made at committee and have written or called us indicating their enthusiastic support.

One of our justice sector partners, the Federation of Ontario Law Associations family law committee—they have different committees for things, but the family law committee told us, “FOLA welcomes changes designed to simplify and streamline the appeal routes for family law cases, as well as the continuance amendments to Ontario statutes in order to make Ontario’s justice system more accessible to Ontarians.” That is exactly what we were aiming to do.

The Ontario Bar Association is supportive as well, telling us that, “The OBA remains strongly in favour of simplifying family law appeal routes, and ensuring families in Ontario are treated equally regardless of where they reside and whether or not spouses are married. The courts have recognized the inconsistency, confusion and inequality in the current appeal structure, which can make it very challenging, even for counsel, to know with certainty where appeals should be taken. This is costly....” It’s time-consuming for lawyers, it’s time-consuming for the clients and it’s very confusing. I had a senior practitioner tell me—he’d been practising for over 20 years. He said, “I get confused, and now, with this change, it’s so much simpler.” It’s going to make it easier to advise clients, regardless of which court they’re in and regardless of what the process is. And so it’s been very well-received, Mr. Speaker.

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These proposed changes in the legislation we’re debating today also respond to the amendments in the federal Bill C-78. Last year, the federal government made wide-ranging changes to language in the federal Divorce Act. The changes are the first substantive changes made to the legislation in exactly 20 years. Twenty years ago: That was the last time the act was comprehensively updated, so it’s a bit of an understatement to say the changes were due. We all know a lot of things can happen in 20 years. The federal Divorce Act amendments take into account the evolution of legal terminology, as well as the common use of the family dispute resolution processes, such as mediation.

Bill C-78, passed in June 2019, is scheduled to come into force on March 1, 2021. With the support of our family justice partners, our government closely reviewed the federal amendments to determine how the changes would impact Ontario’s family justice system and what changes would be needed to prepare our province for the amendments coming into force next May. I just want to go back to basics and say that Ontario runs the court system, but the federal government gets to make legislation in their sphere, so the Divorce Act is within their jurisdiction. When they make changes, it has impacts on how we run the system and how the provincial legislation is affected.

After having consulted with our provincial justice partners, I’m pleased to say that the amendments introduced in Bill C-78 largely reflect our government’s vision

of a faster and easier court process for families. I’d like to thank a number of our justice sector partners who provided feedback on our proposed amendments and came out publicly to support this part of the bill: the Ontario Bar Association, the Middlesex Law Association, Legal Aid Ontario, the Family Dispute Resolution Institute of Ontario and the Ontario Association for Family Mediation.

As part of our ongoing plan to make the government smarter, and in response to the federal government’s modernization of the Divorce Act, the Ontario government is proposing, with the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act, to align our laws with these federal changes. We’ve seized opportunities that the federal bill presented to reduce the burden on the court system by encouraging the use of alternative resolution processes, providing more clarity around the best interests of the child, and better addressing family violence.

Family law is an area where people often represent themselves, as I’ve said, and our government wants to make sure that the changes that follow from the implementation of this law make things as consistent and easy to understand as possible. It includes updating parenting terminology in Ontario’s legislation. We’re removing outdated terms like “custody” and “access.” They’ll be replaced with modern terms like “decision-making responsibility,” “parenting time” or “contact”—less confrontational. It’s more in tune with how family law can and often should be done. It’s the evolving language that helps our family justice system move away from the idea that there are winners and losers in a custody battle. You hear that. You hear people talk about, “I got custody,” or “I got sole custody,” or “He’s fighting for joint custody,” as if it’s chattel and not a child.

It was appropriate at the time, again, but it’s time to move on. Terminology changes. It doesn’t just affect our courts and the family law sector; the divorce terminology is present in the education and medical fields and in many other places. We need to bring family law forward. Our government will continue to engage with schools, government offices and medical professionals to ensure that they’re aware of the revised terminology before it comes into force next spring.

The Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act would adopt a more comprehensive list of factors for the court to consider when determining the best interests of the child. It will be more comprehensive than it currently is, but it will also match the Divorce Act federally. For example, it asks the court to consider the stage of development of a child; the nature of their relationship with the child’s parents, siblings, or grandparents; history of care; and plans for child care as factors to consider when determining the best interests of the child.

We’re also proposing changes to ensure that Ontario’s family laws are equipped to better address family violence. Speaker, the proposed Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act provides greater clarity regarding what constitutes violence. It adopts the definition of “family violence” and “family member” as set out in the federal Divorce Act.

Our review and consultation on federal Bill C-78 also pointed to another area where we could possibly make positive changes. We've identified opportunities to provide more clarity and guidance around circumstances that would require the relocation of a child, a very common source of conversation between couples separating or divorcing.

The proposed amendments would adopt a statutory framework for when a person with decision-making authority relocates with or without a child. If passed, they would also reduce the burden on our court system by adopting the obligations in the federal Divorce Act that encourage the use of alternative dispute resolution processes whenever appropriate, as well as the duties of courts to consider the existence of other proceedings.

The proposed changes in the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act would ensure that Ontario statutes, including Ontario's Children's Law Reform Act, are consistent with federal laws. These changes would ensure family law in the province of Ontario is clear, helping ensure timely results for families and helping reduce the burden on the court system.

I've had a lot of positive feedback on these changes from our justice sector partners, and I'd like to share just some of the comments with you now.

Erin Rankin Nash, the president of the Middlesex Law Association, had this to say: "The Middlesex Law Association is pleased that the government has chosen to modernize Ontario family law to bring it into step with the coming changes to the Divorce Act's parenting provisions. Legislative provisions governing relocation cases will introduce a welcome source of guidance for the families that lawyers serve, and judges and lawyers have been calling for years for more clarity and consistency in appeal routes. The MLA"—that's the Middlesex Law Association—"thanks the Attorney General for his thorough consultation on these family law reforms." And kudos on the consultation has to go out to my parliamentary assistant as well.

The Family Dispute Resolution Institute of Ontario, or FDRIO, as we call it, also wrote to tell me that it welcomes the bundle of family law amendments contained in the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act. Its chair, Neil Maisel, told me these changes will directly benefit family mediators, arbitrators and parenting coordinators and their clients and will facilitate the timely resolution of family law cases, both within and outside the court system, and align the provincial legislation with the recent amendments to the federal Divorce Act.

Kathy Dunne, the president of the Ontario Association for Family Mediation, told me, "The OAFM is pleased to offer our support for the proposed amendments to Children's Law Reform Act (CLRA), and other Ontario statutes as a result of the changes to the Divorce Act. We support the update to the parenting terminology and believe that changing 'custody' to 'decision-making responsibility' is more representative of the responsibilities of parenting that the proposed term refers to.

"Clarity regarding what constitutes violence (e.g., definitions, number of instances) and the introduction of

measures to assist the courts in addressing family violence are much-needed and appreciated amendments.

"The establishment of obligations for lawyers and parties to encourage the use of family dispute resolution processes, such as the very affordable and accessible model of family mediation, and duties of courts to consider the existence of other proceedings makes sense if we are to support access to justice."

These are strong statements of support from our partners, but I would like to share just a few more.

David Field, the CEO of Legal Aid Ontario, writes, "Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) recognizes that access to family justice is promoted through clarity and consistency between federal and provincial family legislation. That is why LAO fully supports the Ministry of the Attorney General's proposed amendments to the Children's Law Reform Act (CLRA) as part of the new Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act.

"In particular, LAO applauds expanding the definitions within the CLRA, and we welcome the necessary steps the ministry is taking to align the" Children's Law Reform Act "with recent changes to the Divorce Act. All of this promotes a greater understanding of best interests of the child and family violence."

Finally, words of support from the Ontario Bar Association, where Frances Wood, the chair of the family law section, tells us, "The OBA"—the Ontario Bar Association—"has been a strong advocate for changes that streamline and remove barriers to the family law system to increase the public's access to the help they need from lawyers. We commend the Attorney General for offering clarity and equal application of laws to married and non-married spouses by responding to our call for consistency between provincial and federal laws following changes to the Divorce Act. We look forward to working with the Attorney General to strengthen access to justice as these and the other amendments introduced today move forward."

I want to thank all of our justice sector partners for their support and words of encouragement as we move through these changes.

Speaker, I'm grateful for the opportunity to talk about this very important piece of legislation. Comprehensive action to advance family law is a critical part of our conversation around moving our justice system forward for Ontarians.

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The goal of the proposed Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act is to support Ontario families and protect vulnerable children. Our objective is to allow parents and guardians to spend less time on paperwork and court appearances and more time making plans to support and care for their children. If passed, these common-sense changes would build on our government's commitment to simplify and modernize the complex and outdated justice system by making the family justice system easier to navigate, reducing the need for court intervention, and making it easier and faster for families to resolve their legal arguments.

Families do not need to, and should not, spend as much time as they are spending tied up in the court system. What they need is clarity, guidance, support; they need help to resolve their issues simply, earlier, quickly and to move on and forward with their lives. That means access to family law services regardless of where they are. This includes access to out-of-court dispute resolution tools and resources, such as family arbitrators. It includes access to a family appeals process they can understand and actually use, no matter where they are or what court is dealing with the matter. Ontario families need to know that their government is working to make the family law system easier, faster and more affordable for them. If passed, the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act would help accomplish exactly that for families across Ontario.

This legislation, if passed, will address elements of the family law system in Ontario that have historically slowed and reduced access to justice for families. The changes we are debating today are reasonable solutions to processes that pose unnecessary challenges for families during some of life's most difficult times. The current system is complex, outdated, difficult to navigate, expensive; families are just trying to seek resolution. Quite simply, we are way overdue for a change.

For members of the justice sector who are committed to supporting families through these difficult moments, these processes challenge their efforts and slow down their work. As a result, Ontarians are left waiting longer to access the system and to resolve their matters. These changes will help eliminate those challenges, those barriers, and move family law forward in substantive ways in Ontario.

I'm sure all members who are debating this legislation today and in the days to come have encountered families who have experienced the stress in resolving family law matters. I've heard the stories, and I'm proud to be proposing legislation that will help. It will help alleviate concerns and difficulties. Our government is working to address the aspects of the family law system that make law matters in the justice system more difficult than they need to be. We know the system can be improved so it is less challenging for families.

This legislation proposes common-sense changes to a system that is outdated and does not serve Ontarians the best that it can. In fact, Mr. Speaker, last fall I think I referred to the court system as very antiquated, and I think I called it "pioneer village." It just came out of my mouth because that's what it felt like—very cumbersome.

Our legislation is filled with changes that will make it easier, faster and more affordable for Ontarians to resolve their family law matters. This bill demonstrates our government's commitment to listening and to supporting families and children when they need it the most. Families across Ontario count on our justice system to provide resolutions to matters of significant importance and stress. In many of these situations, they rely on our family law system. The Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act will help improve the system so that families are able to have their family law matters addressed in a timely and just way.

This bill is reflective of the countless pieces of feedback that we received from Ontarians during our consultations. Our consultations focused on identifying ways to improve family law in Ontario and make it more affordable and less prone to delays that slow down the resolution of family disputes. As I said, when things slow down, sometimes they get worse, and so we're committed to making sure that things are faster, more predictable, more affordable and provide a just resolve.

We listened and we heard about the aspects of the system that could be improved to reduce the amount of needlessly complicated processes that make the system less accessible for those seeking to have their family legal matters addressed. I'm happy to say the feedback we received on the family law system's legislative, regulatory and procedural framework allowed us to bring forward the practical changes that would improve the experience of Ontarians who access the system.

I ask all members of the House to consider supporting the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act. We need to keep moving together to support the children and the families in our communities.

Again, I referenced a few moments ago about how I think we all know somebody who has gone into the system, and it feels like they're on this adventure and it's very confusing. I can't express enough how many times I've heard people tell me that they thought it was simple. They thought they had it worked out with their soon-to-be ex-spouse. They had everything sorted and they just needed to go through the process, and then something happened and the process complicated things. It metastasized their problems. It made them bigger and more significant than they would have been otherwise, because of delay, because of confusion, because the system was just not being tended to. If you think in terms of a garden, it was getting overgrown. It's very confusing.

I want to go back to the unified Family Courts for a moment, because although we've expanded them—we're now at two dozen locations—we still have a long way to go. The unified Family Court started as a concept in Ontario, as a pilot in Hamilton in the late 1970s. It seems like the simplest thing: Where you have three kinds of courts doing family law matters, why wouldn't you just have one? It took a great amount of work to have the federal partners and the provincial partners of the day come together and say, "We're going"—here was the sticking point; this was the sticking point: They had to dual-patent judges. That's what it meant. So a judge would have to be appointed at both the federal and provincial level. That was the nub of it.

Once they figured that out, they said, "Okay, let's try this in Hamilton. Let's see if it works." It sat there as a pilot project, as some things do, for a very, very long time. It sat there for well over a decade. It was talked about. Carl Baar, who was a professor of mine—I did a master's in judicial administration, so I spent some time looking at how this developed and where it could go. Really, quite frankly, the only reason it hasn't moved forward in all

these years is coordination between the federal and the provincial governments to say, “Hey, let’s look at who we’re serving. We’re serving the children and the families of the province. Surely we can coordinate a little better than we have been.”

And so we did that. We went to the federal partners and we said, “We have one constituent, and the constituent is confused, and it’s costing them money, and it’s causing pain in our communities. We just need to move this thing forward.” So we’ve moved forward. I’m intent on moving forward more. I’ve had this conversation, and it’s been received well by my justice partners: Chief Justice Morawetz, Chief Justice Maisonneuve and Chief Justice Strathy, although he’s not directly affected by UFC—really productive conversations about how we can serve the constituents better, take costs out of the system, make it more predictable.

That’s a core thing. Can you imagine, you’re going to go through this process, and all of a sudden, you go to a rack of pamphlets to figure out some sort of guide on how you’re going to move forward, and you have to figure out which of the three guides you need to use. Really, it’s confusing enough, let alone having to make that choice and walk into that, Mr. Speaker. So we’re simplifying. We’re simplifying appeal routes. We’re simplifying terminology. We’re making sure that we’re bringing the partners together to create a better system. We’re simplifying in the sense that we’re creating consistency. We’re aligning with the Divorce Act so that you don’t have two and three pamphlets trying to explain to you what “violence” is or what “best interests of the child” is. We can now consolidate resources for the interests of the constituents, Mr. Speaker. Really, what we’re all about is trying to bring that together.

I really am grateful to have the opportunity to talk about this very important piece of legislation. It’s critical that we get it right, and we did. We listened and we changed and we listened more and we changed again at committee. I’m very pleased with the product that we’re putting before the House for third reading. I look forward to the debate from my colleagues, and I look forward to answering several questions.

This isn’t just something that will be important for people dealing with issues today. We’re fundamentally changing the system for people who will be dealing with it in years to come. They don’t even know that we’re simplifying the system for them, but we are, and it’s really quite a pleasure. I’m honoured to have the support of all of the justice sector partners in the consensus that we have in bringing these changes forward, and I look forward to more questions, Mr. Speaker.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for questions. I turn to the member from Toronto—St. Paul’s.

Ms. Jill Andrew: The Attorney General spoke very directly about the various stakeholders he has gotten support from for Bill 207, the Moving Ontario Family Law

Forward Act. I’m just wondering, then, why the consultations held in the summer of 2019 by the Attorney General and the member from Durham explicitly stated that submissions were not to consider expansion of the unified Family Court system—which, I understand, actually makes it easier for families to access justice—or the level of funding provided to legal aid.

The Attorney General shared a quote from legal aid, but he forgot to share the criticisms that legal aid and many other stakeholders have presented.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pose your question, please.

Ms. Jill Andrew: The question is, why cut \$133 million from Ontario’s legal aid but then say today that this bill is complete in terms of family law?

Hon. Doug Downey: That’s an excellent question and I thank you for it.

When we put the consultation out to have a discussion about ways we can move family law forward—as you heard in my remarks, I’ve spent decades now dealing with the concept of unified Family Courts. We already had a process under way for that. So often, what you hear when you go out to talk to stakeholders is unified Family Courts—well, we already had a process going on, so we didn’t want to use up air time and our precious time with them hearing about something that we already knew the importance of. We wanted them to focus on other areas. We wanted them to focus on these kinds of things so that our engagement with them was more meaningful. It got deeper into other issues instead of dealing with stuff that we were already wrestling with, Mr. Speaker. It’s important that we focus on the parts that we don’t know about, that we’re less confident about. I’m very confident about unified Family Courts. It’s something I’ve spoken with the Minister of Justice federally about several times.

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

Mrs. Gila Martow: I wanted to ask the Attorney General—they say that necessity is the mother of invention—what the COVID-19 pandemic has done to push our ministry to get things virtual, such as power of attorney, estate planning, wills and things like that; not just family law, but other things as well—what the pandemic has done to force you to adapt and develop virtual courtrooms and virtual signing.

Hon. Doug Downey: We started the modernization, as you heard, before the pandemic, in the Smarter and Stronger Justice Act, in December of last year. We had online commissioning and notarizing. We brought that forward in time through the emergency period. We had a number of things under way, but when COVID-19 came, it heightened the challenges we had, and so we doubled down to make sure that we could keep the courts moving and keep them accessible, and that gave us such momentum. I can tell you, the excellent, excellent lawyers in the Ministry of the Attorney General then started to see our lead in the minister’s office. They took hold and they started to find ways that they could contribute to the cause.

That's where the 450 online court forms came from. We had pushed for a number, but they started doing it on their own.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I will look forward to doing my hour lead and getting further into this bill, but I want to touch on access to justice, which is something the Attorney General mentioned. His government cut \$133 million, which was 30% of Legal Aid Ontario. That serves our most vulnerable residents. We heard very clearly through the committee process that it actually costs more on the system because it creates backlogs. It forces our system into a crawl. We heard from judges; we heard from an array of folks who talked about how important it was for people to have real access to justice and to be able to have that representation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pose your question, please.

Miss Monique Taylor: So I would like to know if the Attorney General will commit to no further cuts to our legal aid system and ensure that they will put in further measures so that people truly have—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Back to the Attorney General for a response.

Hon. Doug Downey: I could stand and talk about access to justice all day. It's something near and dear to my heart.

Whether it's being able to see court dockets online, whether it's taking out red tape—there are a number of ways that we've brought access to justice to a new level. Everything that we do—the case lines that I talked about—creates an access that is unparalleled. Going on Zoom for hearings—we had a verdict given just east of Toronto; 20,000 people tuned in to watch the judge deliver the verdict. We've had 50,000 online hearings in the Superior Court alone. That's hundreds of thousands of people affected directly.

I could talk about access to justice all day long, Mr. Speaker—but I'm happy to expand in the next question.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I just wanted to do a follow-up to the Attorney General.

I appreciate the modernization. COVID-19 has accelerated the need for that, and it is important that the court system responds.

I'm sure you're aware that there are certain things that have been put off as a result of COVID-19, as well, and that creates a backlog—some of the family law issues, in particular.

I'm wondering about what you see as needed in terms of further supports and investments for those individuals who perhaps no longer have access to places, like libraries and even restaurants to sit in, where there is WiFi and hot spots. As you know, those places are not as accessible anymore.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pose your question, please.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: So that access is limited for people on low income, which is why services like legal aid are needed and need to be further funded, and not—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The Attorney General for a response.

Hon. Doug Downey: You're absolutely right. We have to build it for the way people live. We have to make sure that we're rightsizing the access points. I agree with that entirely. The type of access that might work for one type of Ontarian may be different for another. So we're building systems and we're building tools to do exactly that.

I want to touch on legal aid, because it was mentioned twice. The threshold is going up each year. We're moving the threshold up for qualification to receive that service. Fairly recently, the clinics have been told that they'll receive a 3% increase to their budgets. And we're modernizing the legal aid system.

So we're not just doing one thing at a time.

This bill, in particular, touches on ways that we're modernizing systems and aligning with the federal government.

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

Mr. Roman Baber: Congratulations, Attorney General, on an excellent bill.

I have not practised family law in my career, but I've had some exposure to family law, and most folks would be amazed to find out how cost-prohibitive family litigation is. An uncontested divorce with a basic separation agreement could run at about 10,000 bucks. A contested divorce without trial could easily come to \$80,000 or \$100,000; with trial, \$250,000 to \$300,000—just unimaginable numbers. Folks who don't have access to cash could often be asked to spec their house, where the lawyer, at the end of the day, would take a lot of the equity. Family litigation in Ontario has become completely inaccessible.

I'm wondering if you could share with the House a concrete example of how this bill is going to save people money.

Hon. Doug Downey: Just the appeal routes alone is going to save money, because no longer does somebody who either has a lawyer or is trying to figure it out have to navigate all of the—it's the same appeal route. Time is money and predictability. We're partnering with people like CLEO, who are offering services to inform people, educate people. We're providing dispute resolution, which, earlier, is cheaper a lot of the time. There are several examples of ways that we can save people actual money.

I was at a dinner one time, Mr. Speaker—it was a Supreme Court judge. We were talking, and she said, "Oh, you don't do litigation." I said, "No, I'm a real estate lawyer. I help people mortgage their house so they can do litigation," and it was only half in jest. It is not a cheap

way to resolve your disputes. We're trying to put pieces in place to let people go to arbitrators, mediators, dispute resolution officers, to take the cost out of it, to get people where they need to be and leave money in their pockets so they can take care of their families and their children.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, if you seek it, I'm sure you'll find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We're in a position to see the clock at 6 o'clock. Agreed? Agreed. Me too.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

Report continues in volume B.

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