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Lundi
7 décembre 2020

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Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 7 December 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 7 décembre 2020

The House met at 0900.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Good morning, everyone. As is tradition, let us pray.

Prayers.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I wish to acknowledge this territory as the traditional gathering place for many Indigenous nations, most recently the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

This being the first sitting Monday of the month, I ask everyone to join in the—while we normally sing, but we won't sing—listening to the Canadian national anthem, followed by the royal anthem.

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

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

REAPPOINTMENT OF CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I beg to inform the House that the following document was tabled: order in council 1640/2020, dated December 3, 2020, reappointing Dr. David Williams as the Chief Medical Officer of Health for a fixed term beginning February 16, 2021, and ending September 1, 2021.

Orders of the day?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): With the ballot item not being moved, I now call orders of the day.

I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's obviously not traditional, but given the circumstances that we find ourselves in, the House is a bit more accommodating to members. Through no fault of her own, the member could not be here today, as was the case last week with another member of the House. We will endeavour to find an opportunity to deal with this motion when the House returns for its winter session.

With that, Mr. Speaker, no further business.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): There being no further business, this House will stand recessed until 10:15.

The House recessed from 0907 to 1015.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

LAND USE PLANNING

Ms. Jill Andrew: This Premier is letting developers buy the right to destroy our environment by sidelining

conservation authorities. Toronto–St. Paul's is not standing for this Conservative government using COVID as a cover while weakening land use planning rules.

I have received near 1,000 messages from the community demanding the removal of schedules 6 and 8 from Bill 229. We are angry about this government's abuse of minister's zoning orders against our green spaces without public consultation. Is the resignation of seven greenbelt council members, including the chair, not enough?

Attacking environmental protections attacks Ontario: our greenbelt, wetlands, flood plains, source water, endangered species, the places where we find solace.

Your abuse of power places our people—children, seniors—in danger of disease and food and water contamination.

During COVID, this government is making it easier for people to lose their property through flooding. Families on Peveril Hill North at Eglinton West, and small businesses like SXS Fitness and Wellness and Casual Hair Salon, have experienced flooding. Where is their compensation?

In St. Paul's, our voices are clear: Remove schedules 6 and 8 from Bill 229. Consult with our communities, authorities and advocates of real environmental stewardship and climate justice before making yet another disastrous decision.

WILMOT FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE

Mr. Mike Harris: Speaker, good morning. It is getting close to Christmas, and while this is a time for celebration and connecting with family, it is also the busiest time of year for our local food banks. Our food banks rely on the generosity of our communities to support them with monetary donations and contributions of non-perishable food.

This past Saturday, the Baden Optimist Club put on a food drive to collect donations for the Wilmot Family Resource Centre, which provides food assistance to individuals and families living in the townships of Wilmot and Wellesley. It was a pleasure to collect food along with volunteers from the Baden Optimist Club, Baden Chamber of Commerce and Wilmot Optimist Club, and a very special guest, Santa Claus himself. Thank you to all those who left donations at the end of their driveways for us and helped to kick off this holiday season by giving back.

If you were not able to participate on Saturday but still want to support the Wilmot Family Resource Centre, you can visit their website to make a donation. They are also looking for sponsors for their Holiday Hamper Program, which provides grocery store gift cards and toys to over 180 families in need.

Christmas is the season for giving, and I encourage all members to find a way to give back to their community over this holiday season.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Jeff Burch: Parker Curran is 19 years old. He loves nature walks and bright colours, yet for the past seven months, Parker has been locked away at the maximum security psychiatric intensive care unit at the St. Catharines hospital. But Parker isn't mentally ill; he's disabled. He has autism. For his entire life, Parker's parents have done everything in their power to ensure he had the best life possible. Now, every day he sits alone in a hospital room, his accomplishments evaporating. Parker can't go home, as he needs more care than his family can provide. He's been on a wait-list for a group home since he turned 18.

My office reached out to the minister to get Parker out of this worsening situation and get him into an appropriate care setting. The response was that, although Parker is a priority, there's nowhere to put him. All available group home spaces are occupied.

Parker isn't the only person stuck in a hospital awaiting placement. From Ottawa to Windsor to Oshawa, adults with autism are unable to receive the care they need and deserve.

My constituents have taken up a petition outlining how the current system of crisis intervention for people with developmental disabilities is inaccessible, unsafe and undignified. It's difficult to understand how the Ontario government didn't see this coming and didn't create more group home spaces. The ball was dropped long before all eyes turned to COVID. The lack of action by the Ontario government is negligent and perpetuates the suffering both of autistic adults and their families. It's past time to do the right thing. It's imperative that this government create more group home spaces and move Parker Curran and all other autistic adults out of the hospital and into an appropriate group home setting. Parker and his family deserve nothing less.

1020

MARKHAM AFRICAN CARIBBEAN CANADIAN ASSOCIATION

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Last week, I attended the 33rd annual virtual scholarship awards gala of the Markham African Caribbean Canadian Association. It's known as MACCA. MACCA is a wonderful community organization based in my riding that has been serving the Afro-Caribbean community in Markham and York region for over 30 years. The annual scholarship award gala since its inception has provided over 300 scholarships valued at over \$300,000 to the brightest students of Afro-Caribbean descent in York region.

MACCA has provided critical community and culturally sensitive services and programs to hundreds of

underserved youth every year. They encourage and support learning and educational success by promoting inclusivity, working hard to strengthen and empower the community. That is why our government is funding \$60 million for the Black Youth Action Plan. By supporting over 10,000 Black youth and families through this program, we will be able to begin addressing the systemic racism and the disparities that they face every day.

I want to thank the president, Lisa-Joy Facey, for your leadership and commitment as well as past president Pat Howell and the entire board of directors for their dedication to this wonderful organization.

CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'd like to rise today and talk about a shocking resignation this weekend from the Greenbelt Council. David Crombie, along with seven more members of the Greenbelt Council, resigned this weekend in protest over the measures in this government's budget that plan to gut conservation authorities.

For weeks, my colleagues and myself have been highlighting the shameful decision of this government to sneak in damaging anti-environmental legislation underneath the smokescreen of the budget. These recent resignations further prove that this government's priorities when it comes to the environment are all wrong. They want to tear up 80 years of environmental protection and help their developer friends pave over the greenbelt.

In Niagara, we saw the absolute worst example of a conservation authority under the previous board—a board, quite frankly, that seemed very determined to act as an arm of development corporations and not a steward of the environment. When these actions were exposed by engaged citizens, they tried to sue them, including a veteran. The changes made to the conservation authority allow the Niagara authority to get back on the right path. This decision has the potential to undo all that good work.

Mr. Speaker, our kids' and our grandkids' futures are at stake. I hope these resignations are the needed encouragement for this government to finally understand how dangerous their plans are. There will be serious consequences. Stop this attack now. We must stand up for our greenbelt, our environment, our climate, our kids and our grandkids.

VOLUNTEERS

Mr. Jim Wilson: Volunteers are amazing people whose work and commitment make a real difference in the lives of their neighbours and organizations within our communities. I'm proud to have been part of this year's South Simcoe Hall of Fame awards.

Mrs. Jo Rains, volunteering in Alliston, is an inspiration to all, whether through her church, the Good Shepherd Food Bank, the cancer society, Meals on Wheels or quietly on her own.

Marijane Archer is committed to the curling club in Beeton and is an energetic supporter of the Fab, the fund for a new community centre in the town.

Joyce Maltby has fostered 36 children over 50 years. She still finds time to volunteer with Matthews House Hospice and the Beeton Fall Fair.

In Angus, Elizabeth Smeulders is active with the Lions Club, the Santa Claus parade and Canada Day celebrations. She sponsors athletic teams and has donated trophies to non-profits like the Special Olympics.

And in Essa, when Wilhelmina Vanderpost isn't beautifying the town with her gardening, she's helping out with the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the cancer society.

Speaker, these award recipients don't give their time and talent because they want something in return; they serve because they want to help others, because they want to make a real difference. I join all members in this assembly in saying thank you to all the volunteers, who go above and beyond to make South Simcoe a better place.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Vincent Ke: As the holiday season is just around the corner, I would like to take this opportunity to remind my constituents in Don Valley North and all Ontarians to remain vigilant about your health and safety during the winter holidays. No matter where you live and celebrate in the province, the top priority is to be sure that we protect ourselves and our loved ones.

Planning for the receipt and rollout of the vaccine is already under way. Our government has created the Ministers' COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force to prepare for the delivery of the vaccine. Speaker, we are almost at the finish line. This is a critical stage in our fight against COVID-19 that will require us to work together as a province and as a country to face the challenges ahead of us, to protect the health and well-being of each and every Ontarian. Therefore, I strongly urge all Ontarians to continue to follow the public health advice.

Together, we can each do our part to limit the spread of the virus during this holiday season.

TREATIES RECOGNITION

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: This morning, again, our month here in the Legislature started with the singing of the royal and Canadian anthems, and again I did not stand for the anthems. I do this to honour my ancestors who signed our treaties. I will continue this until governments honour the treaties that they have signed. I will continue this until Indigenous people are treated equitably and our children have access to education, clean water and safe housing.

I should not have to stand here, Mr. Speaker, and feel like I'm complaining just to get the basic human rights for our people. In that treaty process, our ancestors sacrificed a great deal and, still, I have to beg your government to uphold your end of the treaty. Our children have to go on TV and ask for clean drinking water and safe schools. Speaker, this is unacceptable. Children like Bedahbun and Lyndon from Neskantaga shouldn't have to grow up wondering when they will get clean drinking water. The

crowd, through Ontario, has a role in getting them clean water. Without honesty, fairness and respect from Ontario and Canada, what we have is not a relationship; it is abuse.

We have kept our part of the treaty. It's time for Ontario to start doing the real work of keeping up their side of the treaties. Meegwetch.

HOLIDAY SEASON

Mr. Michael Parsa: I'm happy to rise today and share with everyone how my local communities of both Aurora and Richmond Hill have been preparing for the holiday season. We know the pandemic has made things more challenging for everyone, but as we know, Ontarians are strong, we've persevered, and we've found new ways to carry on with our lives.

Speaker, I was thrilled to participate in both my communities' annual Santa Claus parades. There, I had the chance to see what folks in my riding had done to make their celebrations fun, merry and safe. Even in the midst of a pandemic, Speaker, organizers worked hard to ensure that this year's festivities were celebrated safely and with the well-being of everyone in mind. I want to personally thank the many community groups and businesses that helped make everything possible. Thanks to all of you, the families of Aurora and Richmond Hill were able to enjoy this amazing experience once again this year.

So as you get out there and celebrate, please be mindful of public health guidelines, practise physical distancing and, most importantly, enjoy your holidays. Speaker, we all know that everything is different this year, but the warm holiday spirit that fills our hearts is still the same.

To the residents of Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill and every Ontarian, I wish you and your loved ones a merry Christmas, happy holidays, and a happy and healthy 2021.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mrs. Nina Tangri: As we know, this year has been very difficult for everyone. Whether it's your business, your job or your personal life, COVID-19 has affected us all. As we come to the holiday season, I wanted to express my sincere gratitude to the people of Ontario, our front-line heroes and those who have made the utmost effort to combat this pandemic. I especially would like to thank our Premier and health minister for each day working with the health table to find the right balance by putting the health and safety of our constituents as the utmost priority.

1030

Our businesses have suffered over the months. Many are living alone and have not been able to see loved ones, and those in our long-term-care and senior homes are wanting to stay safe and keep COVID out.

We are by no means over with COVID, but we have certainly learned a lot. Soon, we will have access to a vaccination, which in turn will allow us to finally bring some normalcy to our lives. It will take time to begin travelling, fully open all businesses or visit our loved ones,

but at this time of year, where we just came through Diwali, which represents light over darkness, or as we begin to celebrate the holiday season with Christmas, Hanukkah and, of course, the new year on the way, we can all reflect and bring hope and comfort to our loved ones.

Let's all look forward to the hope that 2021 can bring. Happy Diwali, merry Christmas, happy Hanukkah, Kwanza, whichever way you celebrate. And Speaker, most of all, wishing all members of this House, the Clerks, peace officers, security and staff, a safe and happy new year. Thank you.

ANNUAL REPORT, AUDITOR GENERAL

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table the 2020 annual report from the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario.

JUDE STRICKLAND

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: I seek unanimous consent for a moment of silence for Jude Strickland, an 11-year-old boy in my riding who died on Thursday after being hit by a reckless driver while he was crossing the street on his way home from school on Tuesday. Jude's funeral was yesterday at West Highland church. The community, as well as our grief-stricken crossing guard, are mourning this tragic loss. A moment of silence, please.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Hamilton Mountain is seeking unanimous consent to take a moment of silence in remembrance of this tragic accident. Agreed? Agreed. Please stand.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): God rest his soul. May his family be comforted in this time of sorrow.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Sara Singh: My question is to the Premier.

Despite repeated claims from the Ford government that the COVID-19 pandemic is under control here in our province, yesterday, families saw a record number of new cases. But the Ford government still seems more concerned with words than actually taking action.

The Premier spent the last few weeks blaming Ottawa for a lack of vaccine planning, but on Friday, the government's vaccine task force met for the first time to discuss a vaccine distribution plan that is supposed to be ready for this province in days.

Why is the government once again scrambling to address this crisis?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I turn to the Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. In fact, we have been working on vaccine planning for months. This is something that both the Office of the Solicitor General as well as the Ministry of Health have been working on together, because this is the largest immunization campaign in at least 100 years in Ontario. This is massive. There are many, many logistics to be thought of and organized here.

We do have the task force that's organized by General Hillier, who's leading the task force. He has said on a number of occasions that he was very impressed with the significant amount of work that had already been done in planning, and the task force is building on that foundational base.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member for her supplementary.

Ms. Sara Singh: While the Ford government tries to deny it, the COVID-19 pandemic is a real crisis. Hospitalizations have doubled since November 1. The head of the Ontario Hospital Association said this weekend, "I don't think the people of Ontario realize the gravity of what's about to happen."

Families don't need the Premier to make empty claims that the curve is going down while they delay critical investments. The longer this government tries to wait things out, the worse it's going to get. When will we see a plan to ensure that the most vulnerable people in our province and the hardest-hit communities get not just a vaccine but the help they need to survive this pandemic?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would say to the member opposite, through you, Mr. Speaker, that we certainly recognize that this is a very, very critical time. Both in terms of testing and making sure that we can care for people, we have built up the reserves in order to be able to do that. We've spent hundreds of millions of dollars to do that. We've created over 3,100 more beds. We're building up the health human resources. We've spent over \$1 billion in testing, tracing and contact management.

And while we have the light at the end of the tunnel, which is the vaccine that's going to be coming forward, we're urging everybody to, please, still follow the public health measures that are so necessary in order to prevent further community transmission.

But we are ready for it. We are ready. Our hospitals are ready. I am in regular contact with the Ontario Hospital Association, and we're making the regulatory changes that we need to. We're making the changes in moving public health regions from green to yellow or red as we need to. That's why we needed to put both Peel and Toronto into lockdown: to prevent that community transmission.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Brampton Centre for final supplementary.

Ms. Sara Singh: The Ford government may want to deny it, but we are now entering the most challenging part of this crisis. More than ever, families, especially vulnerable families and essential workers, need their government to step up and start taking action. That means

a ban on evictions so that people have a home they can safely isolate in. That means paid sick days so essential workers don't have to choose between health and taking a loss on a day's pay. And that means a cap on class sizes so that our schools can be a safe place for our children.

When will this government stop trying to play the waiting game, spend the money that needs to be invested in this province and help people now?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: We've been putting workers, the families and the people of this province number one in every decision we make. In fact, I'm proud to say that at our Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, we launched community safety blitzes on Thanksgiving weekend. We're sending more than 200 provincial offences officers and Ministry of Labour inspectors into zones across the province that are facing high numbers of COVID-19 to ensure that businesses have stepped up, that they're following public health advice and putting in the health and safety protocols to keep workers safe, to keep customers safe and to keep every community safe across the province.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Sara Singh: My question is to the Premier. This weekend, another 28 families tragically lost a loved one due to COVID-19 in our long-term-care homes. For months, the Ford government has denied that their decision to cancel resident quality inspections in long-term care homes has left seniors vulnerable.

On Friday, the government's own long-term-care commission said that they were wrong and called for inspections to be reinstated immediately. Will the Ford government finally stop denying that these cuts had terrible consequences and reverse them?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Our government has been clear since the beginning of this pandemic that our priority, our commitment, is to the residents and staff in long-term care. These are our most vulnerable people. Around the world, these long-term-care homes and long-term-care residents are being affected. Across Canada, it's the same issue.

Ontario has taken steps, and we've moved decisively the whole way. We're acting on the Auditor General's report from 2015 when there was a transition from the RQIs to risk-based inspections. To be clear, this was validated by Justice Gillese in her inquiry recommendations in the summer of 2019. Every home in Ontario is inspected annually and it's unannounced. There were over 2,000, almost 3,000 inspections last year in comparison to 2012. So risk-based inspections allowed us to double the responses to complaints and critical incidents in this shift that was recommended—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: —by the Auditor General and supported in the recommendations by Justice Gillese in her report.

1040

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please. Just a reminder: I'm hearing some noise from the opposition when responses are being given, and truthfully, I don't appreciate it. So I'm going to ask that we—and the Clerks' table—have things under control. I would ask that those comments be refrained. Thank you very much.

Back to the member from Brampton Centre for her supplementary question.

Ms. Sara Singh: For months the Premier and his Minister of Long-Term Care insisted that for-profit long-term-care homes were rigorously inspected and held to high standards. Their own commission now says that this just simply isn't the case and, as a result, residents in long-term care were left unprotected from COVID-19 outbreaks.

Will the Ford government now admit the decision to cut these inspections was wrong, and commit today to immediately implement the commission's recommendations?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: We're very grateful to the commissioners for their information, their insights and their guidance. That's why we struck the commission: to understand in a more fulsome way, in an objective way what else could be done.

As I said, we are inspecting the homes on an annual basis. There are more inspections than were done in 2012, and inspectors issued more compliance orders in 2019 than 2018, 2017 and 2016. The inspections are a combination: not only are the Ministry of Long-Term Care inspectors in homes, the Ministry of Labour, public health unit medical officers of health and their staff are there providing the scrutiny in these homes.

What the commissioners did say in their second letter was to have a better coordination of these inspections, which I believe is something that we will be considering. But there are inspections—there are annual inspections; there are unannounced inspections; there were almost 3,000 inspections this year. We'll continue to provide all the scrutiny and all the levers.

Can we improve? Absolutely. We will continue to improve.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Final supplementary from the member from Brampton Centre.

Ms. Sara Singh: The government's own commission describes a broken inspection system. The minister knows that there is a difference between the resident quality inspections and the critical inspections that are being done right now—there is a major difference between them—and she knows that for-profit facilities were not properly inspected. Even when those inspections did identify problems, those recommendations weren't even acted upon.

The Premier has been trying to save money when, in fact, he should be trying to save lives. He has been protecting those long-term-care homes owners, when, in fact,

he should be protecting those vulnerable residents in our long-term-care homes. When will the Premier stop defending the indefensible and start taking action?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Our government has been taking swift and decisive action since the very beginning, putting residents at the centre. The studies do show that the major driver of an outbreak is the incidents in the community and the severity of an outbreak is related to the older aged homes, which were not rebuilt and not redeveloped over the years preceding our government.

Our government has been the very first government to look at these issues, these very severe issues, whether it's staffing or the capacity in the homes and the older rooms. This is something that we've been dealing with, and to mention the dollars—it's just not accurate. Our government has spent more dollars than previous governments. If you look at the \$540 million—the \$461 million to improve the pay for our front-line workers; the \$243 million that we put out initially to provide staffing and IPAC support; the \$30 million to provide more IPAC training; the \$2.8 million to provide PPE; and the tens of millions of dollars for additional training. The dollars have gone out. We are making sure that the long-term-care sector is—

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

The next question.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: To the Premier: During this pandemic, while most people were focused on trying to stay safe, this government was busy launching sneak attacks against the environment on behalf of well-connected developers, most of whom happen to be donors to the PC Party of Ontario or to the Premier.

Over the weekend, most of the Greenbelt Council, including its well-respected chair, David Crombie, submitted their resignations in protest against this government's attacks on the conservation authorities, an attack buried in the pages of an omnibus bill.

Why is this Premier constantly attacking the environment for the benefit of his developer friends and donors? Why?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment.

Mr. Parm Gill: Municipal affairs.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Municipal affairs. I knew that.

Mr. Parm Gill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the member opposite for that question. Mr. Speaker, of course we want to thank all members of the Greenbelt Council for their service. The amendments to schedule 6 of Bill 229 state very clearly that they do not apply to the lands within the greenbelt. The minister has been clear that we will not permit any development in the greenbelt.

Our government has committed to expanding the quality and quantity of the greenbelt in our budget 2020.

That's why the minister asked the council for an action plan that we could use to achieve this, but unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, there has been no progress or clear strategy put forward by the council. We're hoping that with a fresh perspective on the council, we will be able to fulfill this commitment.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Next question? Over to the member from Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: My question is also to the Premier. Speaker, my office has been flooded with calls from Sudburians who are demanding that schedule 6 be removed from the COVID bill. It's not just Sudburians, Speaker; the Greenbelt Council, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, conservation authorities, environmental groups, cottagers' associations and thousands of regular people have asked the Conservative government to stop its attack on the conservation authorities.

But instead of listening to these non-partisan voices, the Premier and his ministers treat these people with disrespect and contempt. The Conservatives have doubled down and made their bad bill even worse. Why is it, Speaker, that the only people who count for the Premier are his developer friends and donors?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I refer to the government House leader for a response.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. Many of the recommendations with respect to changes to conservation authorities come after months of consultation between the minister and stakeholders. We have heard in this House on a number of occasions the importance of flood mitigation, and building on the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan, of course, we have brought the conservation authorities back to their core mandate, which is flood prevention. In adding to that, we've enabled conservation authorities to issue stop-work orders; they've never been able to do that before.

We're allowing conservation authorities to appeal under certain sections of the Planning Act; we've not done that before. And we've made appointments to the conservation authorities more democratic. I think these are good changes. They build on the progress that we've made on protecting the environment, and I hope the members opposite will support it after question period.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Michael Parsa: Over the past few weeks, my constituents, along with all Ontarians, have been relieved by the great news coming from the life sciences sector. Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca have all announced positive results regarding their COVID-19 vaccinations. But we know this is going to be the largest logistical undertaking that we've had in a generation, once vaccination production ramps up.

We have to get this vaccine to every corner of this province. It's no small feat, and we know we can't do it alone. We need the help of businesses and people with the

necessary expertise in logistics, technology, patient care and pharmaceuticals. These partnerships will be essential in supporting the province's large-scale logistical efforts for Ontario's COVID-19 vaccination program.

Speaker, would the Premier please share with my constituents about what our government is doing to ensure that we have a smooth vaccination rollout?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker—and it's great to see you in the seat there, Mr. Speaker—thank you to the member for Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill for that question. We'll be leveraging the expertise and the resources right here in Ontario, from both the public and private sectors. Our government has taken decisive leadership and created a COVID-19 vaccine distribution task force to provide advice and recommendations on this very, very timely, effective and ethical execution of Ontario's COVID-19 immunization program.

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The task force will focus on several key areas, specifically on delivery, logistics, administration, clinical guidance as well as public education and outreach. Members of the task force include experts in logistics and distribution, bioethics, behavioural science, vaccines, vulnerable populations and IT infrastructure.

I want to thank General Hillier for stepping up and serving as chair of this task force, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Michael Parsa: My supplemental question is also to the Premier. I also would like to send my thanks to General Hillier and all the members of the vaccination task force for their commitment and sacrifice to the people of this province at this critical time.

As reported, our government has been preparing for months, with hundreds of officials planning for the day we receive our first vaccines. And as General Hillier said, he has been amazed at just how much work has been done. That's why our government has put the best and brightest on the task force to help at this critical juncture. They will stress test and make sure beyond a shadow of a doubt that Ontario will be ready.

Premier, I know that you've had continued discussions with major pharmaceutical companies like Pfizer. Speaker, would the Premier please elaborate more with the Legislature about Ontario's vaccination preparedness and our call for further clarity from the federal government.

Hon. Doug Ford: Again, I want to thank the member for the question. I would also like to thank the vaccination task force for their commitment and sacrifice, for the people of this province have really stepped up to the plate, Mr. Speaker.

As reported, our government has been preparing for months—not days, but months—with hundreds of officials planning for the day we receive the first vaccine.

As General Hillier said, and our MPPs and everyone have said, he's amazed how much work we've done over the last few months. That's why our government has put the best and the brightest minds on this task force to help this crucial juncture. They will stress test and make sure

beyond a shadow of a doubt that Ontario will be ready. And as sure as I'm standing here, Mr. Speaker, we are ready and we're ready to get the vaccine distributed. All we need to know from the federal government is what we're getting, how much we're getting and when we're getting it, and we're ready to move the troops out.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Premier. Today's report by the Auditor General confirms what families have known for years: retirement homes have become homes for thousands of people who should be in long-term care. Many residents are left to suffer, not being offered suitable meals, not being provided with personal hygiene services such as bathing and grooming, and bed sores that become infected. Why has the Ford government turned a blind eye?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): To the government House leader for a response.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the minister of seniors, who has responsibility for retirement homes, has been undertaking a tremendous amount of work in co-operation with the Minister of Long-Term Care, and of course with all members on this side of the House.

We recognized, obviously right from the beginning when we took office and the Premier made it a priority, that we had to rebuild and build out our long-term-care sector as soon as we possibly could. That's why significant amounts of resources were put into place, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that that could happen. That also meant that additional resources would be made available for our retirement homes. We are consistently working on that. We understand how important it is to families across the province of Ontario, and of course we will continue to build on the success that we've had, even despite the challenges that we face during COVID.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from London–Fanshawe for a supplementary.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, the auditor's findings should not be news to anyone, much less the Ford government.

During COVID-19, families have heard about retirement homes infested with bed bugs, cockroaches and broken bathrooms.

The auditor reveals today that licences are issued despite identifying red flags, that five retirement home operators have not installed fire sprinkler systems, and the financial welfare of the operators is put ahead of the mandate to protect residents.

When will the government stop turning a blind eye and start making changes that residents need?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Todd Smith: We thank the Auditor General for her report this morning. There is a lot of great information and analysis done on a number of different sectors of government, Mr. Speaker. But I can tell you that Minister

Cho, the minister responsible for seniors, has been looking at all of the issues within his ministry, issues that are 15 years in the making, because for a long, long time, that sector had been ignored by the previous government.

What I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that Minister Cho is actively working on a comprehensive review of the Retirement Homes Act, as well as our government's seniors strategy. The one thing that Minister Cho is really concerned about is that we help our older adults stay healthy. We want them to be as active as possible. We want them to be as socially connected as possible within their communities, and we want them to live in safe residences.

That's why Mr. Cho is taking the recommendations from the Auditor General's report extremely seriously, and we'll be implementing those recommendations over a period of time.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is to the Premier. Over the weekend, chair David Crombie and six members of the Greenbelt Council resigned in protest of this government's stubborn refusal to back down from schedule 6 of their budget bill, Bill 229, and doubling down on environmentally destructive amendments. This government has once again given Ontarians no reason to believe that they would act in good faith with the broad new powers that they're granting themselves to override environmental stewards.

This government has a shameful track record on the environment. As shown by the Auditor General, they're failing to protect endangered species at risk, attempting to open up the greenbelt for development in Bill 66, and bulldozing over science-based decisions and using MZO to pay favours to the Premier's developer friends.

When will this stop? This is an unbridled march to environmental disaster. The Premier was clear when he, on his campaign trail, said, "We are going to open up the greenbelt for development"—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Over to the Premier.

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank the member for her comments. I also want to thank the members, the Liberal-appointed members, from the Greenbelt Council for their service.

We committed to expanding the quality and quantity of the greenbelt in 2020. During the election, I said I wasn't going to touch the greenbelt. Unlike the Liberal government that touched it 17 times, I have not touched the greenbelt. We won't touch the greenbelt. We won't build on the greenbelt.

Now, when it comes to MZOs, I know they aren't in favour of accelerating 3,700 long-term-care home beds, 720 affordable housing units, 100 supportive housing units, 16,000 market-priced rental homes and 26,000 jobs. If we were waiting for the Liberals, we'd be waiting for another 20 years, as we did under their administration.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Scarborough–Guildwood for supplementary.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: The Premier knows full well that the amendment does not protect the greenbelt. It's just words. What do we have to do to make this firm? You are caught on tape promising your insider friends to pave over the greenbelt. You can't take that away.

Instead of listening to the public, who want a clean, safe environment, cottagers, environmental groups, and the 36 conservation authorities themselves, the government has doubled down on their goal to weaken environmental protections in this province. At the eleventh hour, they introduced amendments, after the opportunity for public scrutiny and input had passed.

Speaker, the Premier must stand today and commit to (1) not paving over the greenbelt and keeping it off limits to developers, and (2) removing schedule 6 from Bill 229. Yes or no?

Hon. Doug Ford: I have committed not to be paving anywhere in the greenbelt, unlike the Liberals for 15 years. They were paving everywhere throughout the greenbelt. As a matter of fact, they switched it 17 times. Did they switch it just because they felt good? No, because they were protecting their development buddies. Now, the hypocrisy is, Steven Del Duca—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me, Premier. I'm going to ask you to withdraw that one comment.

Hon. Doug Ford: Okay. I'll withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Continue.

Hon. Doug Ford: Steven Del Duca, the Liberals' leader now, has carved up the greenbelt 17 times, again. But the leader of the Liberals, Stephen Del Duca himself, ignored planning processes and built a private swimming pool for him and all his buddies and totally ignored the conservation authority. Then when he got caught, Mr. Speaker, rather than fixing his mess, he tried to convince the TRCA to allow him to keep his pool and all his buddies over there, doing the backstroke with those development buddies.

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MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Michael Parsa: My question this morning is for the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Thanks very much, Speaker.

My question this morning is for the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. I was proud to hear that our government has made investments to assist our front-line police officers across the province in handling mental health cases. Minister, we know that while the mobile crisis teams we are launching and expanding have been in demand for so long, our government has always been focused on ensuring Ontarians living with a mental health

or addictions challenge have access to wraparound supports which will fully support them on their journey to mental wellness.

Minister, could you please update the members of this Legislature on how our mental health investments in the justice system will lead to better supports for those living with mental health or addiction challenges, such as those in crisis?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: I want to thank the member for Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill for the question. As part of this much-needed investment in our justice system, we will be providing over \$14 million for supportive housing programs designated for justice-involved individuals. What that means, Mr. Speaker, is we're going to fund 524 new units across the province for individuals who are either on diversion plans from mental health court or have been released from a provincial correctional facility, including \$1 million for up to 20 units that are affiliated with five post-court transitional case managers.

This will ensure that we are able to provide the most appropriate supports to individuals living with mental health and addiction challenges within the justice system, while offering rapid access to services such as counselling, therapy and peer support, with the aim of safely transforming the individuals and transitioning them back into their community.

Mr. Speaker, our investments are real and they're there to help individuals come back into and be productive in our society.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill.

Mr. Michael Parsa: I want to thank the minister for his response. I know my constituents will be pleased to hear that our government is doing everything possible to support our front-line heroes as they handle mental health cases, especially during these difficult times. Since the pandemic first started, people across our great province have been experiencing anxiety and depression at alarming rates. We've seen polls and reports from a number of organizations highlighting these figures, and we know that our front-line heroes have been there to support us every step of the way.

As Ontario continues to navigate through this second wave of COVID-19, our front-line heroes need our support. I know our government has taken action to address the burnout, anxiety, depression and even PTSD that our front-line heroes have been struggling with. Minister, would you please update the members of this Legislature on the steps that we have taken to address the mental health of our front-line heroes?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: I want to begin by thanking all the first responders and our front-line workers for the incredible work they've done through this unprecedented time. We know and we recognize that since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, we've seen thousands of Ontarians reach out for help, including thousands of our front-line workers, especially our front-line health care workers. And, Mr. Speaker, that's why we invested \$26.75 million,

during the COVID-19 pandemic to help mental health agencies hire and train more staff, purchase the necessary equipment and technology they need to help patients and support the creation and enhancement of virtual and online supports for mental health services, including iCBT.

Through this emergency funding, online iCBT was also made available to front-line health care workers experiencing anxiety, burnout or post-traumatic stress disorder. Mr. Speaker, we're here to support our front-line workers, because they are looking after us in the province of Ontario.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning. My question is to the Premier. Week after week, we've listened to the minister stand here and swear up and down that everything is A-okay, that schools are fine, that we don't need testing or smaller class sizes. Today, schools are being shut down over an explosion of previously unidentified COVID cases.

Speaker, not only are COVID outbreaks in schools worse than anyone ever thought, we don't even know how much worse it's going to get. We have asked repeatedly for the government to explain why they ignored expert advice to cap class sizes at 15 to keep our children safe. The government wouldn't provide that information. We went through freedom of information, and guess what? Again, the wall comes down and we get back blank pieces of paper.

What is this government trying to hide? If the government knows it has done the wrong thing, show some leadership and turn this ship around.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I refer to the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education for a response.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thanks to the member opposite. Our government has always been very clear that we will do whatever it takes to ensure that students and staff are kept safe across our province. It's why we've introduced new initiatives and more funding to ensure that schools are being supported, safe and kept open throughout the second wave. We are again building upon our plan to protect students and staff. We have increased funding and expanded testing, training and interactive learning supports to keep our schools open and, of course, safe.

Speaker, let's be clear: Our government has launched voluntary COVID-19 testing for asymptomatic students in regions of the province which currently have a high number of active COVID-19 cases. Expanding this asymptomatic testing will introduce a critical layer of prevention in our schools to ensure that students are kept safe today and into the future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Davenport for the supplementary.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Again, back to the Premier: The member opposite should be looking out for the people in his community of Smithville, where they are experiencing an outbreak.

The problem with this government's spin is that they've spun themselves so far away from reality that they have no idea what's going on in schools right now, Mr. Speaker. While the government rolls out a Hail Mary effort, telling schools to keep the windows open during the winter and hope that keeps COVID away, more children are testing positive, and more staff, too.

Speaker, through you again to the Premier: It's clear that this government has not just lost the plot; they've lost the confidence of all Ontarians. When will the government step up with a real plan that stops prioritizing political consultants and PC insiders and finally puts our children and our families first?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Speaker, Ontario has a robust plan that is fully endorsed by the Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario, Ontario's top doctor, a medical expert who has dedicated his life to professional service in order to ensure that students and our staff are kept safe in schools across this province.

Let me remind the member opposite that we've invested an additional historic \$1.3 billion to hire an additional 3,000 teachers, 1,200 custodians, 625 new nurses. The member of course, speaking about local communities, knows that 99.9% of TDSB's students do not have an active case and 99.5% of TDSB students have never had COVID.

Speaker, we are investing in what matters most, and that's the health and safety of Ontario's students. It's why we have a robust plan, one that keeps students and staff safe.

CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES

Mr. Mike Schreiner: My question is for the Premier.

The chair of the TRCA, a long-time Conservative, wrote in a column asking the government to remove schedule 6 from Bill 229, "I greatly admired the leadership of Bill Davis and Brian Mulroney for how they balanced environmental stewardship with fiscal responsibility. It saddens me that the party would turn away from that."

Former Progressive Conservative cabinet minister David Crombie wrote in his resignation letter, "This is not policy and institutional reform. This is high-level bombing and needs to be resisted."

Speaker it's not just AMO, it's not just Ontario's Big City Mayors, it's not just the OFA, it's not just community groups and environmental NGOs calling on the government to stop attacking conservation authorities; it's Conservative politicians telling the Premier to stop this fiscally irresponsible attack on protecting us from flooding. So will the Premier commit today to listening to the people and removing schedule 6 from Bill 229?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm glad the member referenced all of the accomplishments of Conservative governments in protecting the environment across the province of Ontario.

He's quite correct: The Ministry of the Environment was created by a Progressive Conservative government.

He's quite correct: Conservation authorities were creatures of a Progressive Conservative government.

He's quite correct: It was a Progressive Conservative government, under former Premiers Harris and Eves, that announced the elimination of coal-fired plants in the province of Ontario. It was a Conservative government that invested in our nuclear capacity, which allowed us to get rid of coal-fired power, and it is a Conservative government that, once again, will lead the way in protecting the environment across the province of Ontario. That member can count on that.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member for Guelph for his supplementary question.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I would say this member is quite correct that the government is throwing that legacy away. Over the course of this pandemic, they've gutted the environmental assessment process, they've gutted the Endangered Species Act, and now they're gutting the ability of conservation authorities to protect us from flooding. To put that into perspective, the province contributes 8% of CA budgets. They only paid \$7.4 million in flood mitigation prior to 2019, and then, in 2019, they cut even that meagre amount in half.

We know that flooding costs are going to triple over the next decade, so will the government listen to AMO, the big city mayors, the Greenbelt Council, conservation authorities, Conservative politicians, community organizations and environmental NGOs who are all coming calling for them to stop this reckless attack on CAs? Can they explain to us who actually supports what they're doing?

Hon. Paul Calandra: As I mentioned earlier, it is for exactly that reason why we are making these changes right now. The member has highlighted on a number of occasions the importance of conservation authorities focusing on flood abatement, and that's what this does. Building on the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan, we understand how important that is. That is why the conservation authorities have the authority now under this legislation to issue stop-work orders. That is why conservation authorities will have the right to appeal under certain parts of the Planning Act.

Obviously the important work of conservation authorities will continue. We expect that. But, as the member said, we need to focus on flood mitigation. That's what our conservation authorities need to continue to do. They need to do it better, and these amendments will help them do that.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Michael Parsa: We know that COVID-19 has been difficult for families and businesses in Ontario. Paired with the Liberal legacy of skyrocketing electricity costs for major employers like the auto industry, many of my constituents have been asking our government for help to jump-start economic recovery. Would the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines tell this House

what our government is doing to support employers in my riding, please?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the parliamentary assistant to the minister of energy, northern mines—

Mr. Dave Smith: Energy, northern development and mines. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to thank the member from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill for that question. What we have seen during the economic recovery of Ontario is that the rising electrical costs made it that much more difficult. What we're doing now is we're going to be reducing those electrical costs for businesses by funding a portion of the cost of wind, solar and bioenergy, the failed policy of the Liberal government. By doing this, industrial consumers like the auto industry could see a savings of up to 14%.

Scott Bell, president of General Motors Canada, stated the issue best by saying, "One of the key competitive negatives for manufacturing in Canada is the high Ontario cost of electricity.... These are costs our American factories don't face."

Mr. Speaker, we are proud to support the auto industry and everyone who is employed there—more than 100,000 hard-working Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Supplementary question?

Mr. Michael Parsa: I'd like to thank the parliamentary assistant for that great response. I've always agreed that commercial and industrial ratepayers should not have to pay for the energy mess left behind by the previous Liberal government. It's clear by GM's recent investment in their Oshawa plant that they agree that Ontario is back as the best place to do business.

I hear the same concerns from vehicle manufacturers like Magna in my riding. Would the minister tell this House what we're doing to help the vehicle manufacturing industry lead our economic recovery?

Mr. Dave Smith: We're helping commercial ratepayers, like manufacturing, with electrical costs. By shifting the global adjustment costs caused by the Liberal green energy mess, commercial customers will see a savings of up to 16% on their bills.

The Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association commended our actions and said this about it: "Reducing these costs will help to position the automotive industry for success."

Mr. Speaker, we are proud to support the auto industry and its entire supply chain in this difficult time so they can reinvest in their businesses and lead the economic recovery as we come out of COVID-19.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is for the Minister of Long-Term Care. It's been a full year since we debated my bill, the Till Death Do Us Part act. Since then, I have been working with local health officials to try and reunite a couple, Joan and Jim McLeod, who have been married for

62 years. Unfortunately, due to differing levels of care and a growing crisis list, they may never be reunited.

Joan and Jim are just one of the countless couples separated by our long-term-care system. The system needs to work for them. Work needs to be done to keep loved ones together, especially during these challenging times.

Speaker, to the minister: What, if anything, is being done to keep couples together as they age?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for raising that important concern. It's what brought me to politics in the first place, having experienced this with my own family, so I know how important that this is.

Our government is continually working to address what has been a neglected system for almost two decades. Understanding the capacity issues that were left behind and the staffing issues, all of these will need to be addressed to make sure that we put our residents at the centre and create a 21st-century long-term-care system that puts our residents at the forefront with their needs. This will be an ongoing effort.

As the member opposite knows, we are in the midst of a pandemic. Unfortunately, some of the outbreaks are restricting visitors, but our residents can still allow and designate two essential caregivers to make sure that they are able to enter into the home.

We are continuing to adapt and be agile as we move ahead during this difficult time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Waterloo for the supplementary.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Actually, Mr. Speaker, because of the outbreak, there are actually beds available in this province.

We have seen the impact that the pandemic has had on our seniors and those in congregate settings who were denied access to their usual family supports. There is no doubt that people suffered and died. My colleague from Windsor West recognized this and brought forward a bill that would guarantee access for essential caregivers.

Well, Speaker, spouses and partners need to be there for one another as well, and I hope the minister takes our request for a more responsive spousal reunification system very seriously. This couple has been married for 62 years. When couples are separated by a system that is not designed for them, they lose faith in their government. Jim McLeod wanted me to pass along a message to the minister. He wants the minister to "Open your eyes," Minister, "to what is happening" in our long-term-care system.

Speaker, what is the government going to do today to fix this broken system? This is a cruel system that keeps married couples from spending their last years together; seniors in Ontario deserve so much more.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you again for raising this important concern. My heart goes out to this couple that has been affected by this, and everyone that's been affected by it. I, too, feel the pain. I know I went through it with my own family.

Our government has a sense of urgency for this, and as I said, we are working diligently to address the capacity issues. Some \$540 million was announced in October to make sure that we took the staffing measures and the infection prevention and control measures that we needed—the \$243 million, initially, and the \$461 million to address the pay for our front-line workers; the tens of millions of dollars that we’re putting forward to create staffing supports—while we work on a long-term-care staffing strategy. We’re not only stabilizing this sector. We’re advancing, repairing and rebuilding this sector after so many, many years of neglect.

We inherited a broken system on so many levels. Our government has put long-term care at the forefront. We will continue our important work for all Ontarians.

COLLEGE STANDARDS AND ACCREDITATION

Mr. John Fraser: It was really great to see the Premier this morning, and I wish him a recovery. It looks like he’s getting better. He did tell us that he had his back zapped last week, and in this place, especially where he sits, the one thing you’ve got to watch is your back.

On that note, we’re going to be talking about Bill 213 and Charles McVety’s special deal today, and we’re all hoping the Premier could have had a come-to-the-light moment. The bottom line is, Charles McVety’s words spread division. He tells other people they’re a threat. Those are the words that we hear when minorities are persecuted around the world. We’ve heard them for centuries. They’re very, very dangerous words.

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By voting in support of Mr. McVety today, those members who vote for it will be endorsing those words. Will the Premier be voting to endorse those words today?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I turn to the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Mr. David Piccini: Hateful words have no place in this province. That’s why our government continues to work diligently with all of our partners in the post-secondary sector to ensure we have a world-class education system. One of the reasons we have a world-class education system is because we have groups like the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board that ensure that all applications for expanded degree-granting authority, for nomenclature change etc. meet rigorous scrutiny.

We’re going to continue to uphold procedural fairness, continue to support PEQAB’s recommendations and continue to ensure that we have a world-class education system in the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Ottawa South for the supplementary.

Mr. John Fraser: Make no mistake, it’s payday at Queen’s Park. Charles McVety is getting a special deal. The Premier’s priorities clearly haven’t changed.

Through this debate, I’ve watched members on the other side of the House in question period and in debate.

When we talk about this, people’s heads are down on their desks, even so much that 30 members abstained from a vote condemning Charles—

Interjection: How many?

Mr. John Fraser: Thirty members.

There are three things that we can do here today: People can vote in support of Bill 213 and Charles McVety, or they can vote against and join us, or they can do what they did on that motion and abstain—do nothing. Doing nothing in this case is the right thing to do.

So I ask the Premier once again, will the Premier not discipline any of his caucus members who abstain from this vote?

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you again to the member opposite for the question. You know, Mr. Speaker, it’s disappointing from the member opposite. Under his previous government, that member—and he should know when institutions came, including faith-based institutions, and asked for expanded degree granting, the member would introduce things through private bills.

This government is ensuring procedural fairness. This government is ensuring that all institutions are rigorously assessed by the PEQAB process. We’re going to continue doing that and the members opposite know that. We’re going to continue to ensure a world-class education system—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Member from Scarborough–Guildwood, come to order.

Mr. David Piccini: Mr. Speaker, I know they’re frustrated.

That’s why we’ve ensured a rigorous assessment process, and we’re going to continue to support our world-class education system through lowering tuition fees, through enhanced supports for mental health and ensuring that Ontario is a destination for people to study, regardless of creed, colour or religion. They’ll choose Ontario because of our high quality of education.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Suze Morrison: My question is to the Premier. There are new horrific stories coming out of the Landlord and Tenant Board every single day. In one case, an adjudicator issued an order in a case where they had an obvious conflict of interest. In another, a tenant who identified herself as a survivor of domestic violence was told that she had to disclose her phone number in an online public forum in an online hearing, putting her safety at risk, in order to receive legal aid.

On Friday, I listened to a block of hearings and what I heard made me sick. The hearing was riddled with technical issues. Some tenants didn’t understand what was going on. One tenant was evicted in less than a minute. Speaker, how is this justice?

Will the Premier finally do the right thing and stop these problem-riddled online hearings from proceeding and immediately reinstate a moratorium on evictions?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Referred to the government House leader for response.

Hon. Paul Calandra: As the Attorney General, I think, mentioned last week, significant work is being done to increase the availability of adjudicators for the Landlord and Tenant Board of the province of Ontario. We have heard from the opposition of the need to deal with the delays that were at the board as a result of too few adjudicators. That has been resolved, and as more adjudicators come online, we'll be able to deal with the backlog further.

Online hearings, of course, are something that will have to continue. We are dealing with COVID, Mr. Speaker, as you know, as all members will know. But, again, as the Attorney General said, we are dealing with the backlog, we've hired more adjudicators and we expect the good work of the board to continue even throughout COVID.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Toronto Centre for supplementary.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Respectfully, a backlog of cases should not be your priority in a pandemic. This government's priority should be keeping every single person in this province housed until we are through this crisis.

Speaker, I heard from Sarah, a tenant in Kitchener who contacted my office last week. Sarah lost her job at the beginning of the pandemic and has since struggled to get caught up on her back rent. She had an eviction hearing on Tuesday and is now waiting to learn if her family will be forced out of their home. If Sarah, her husband and her son—who, by the way, has a respiratory issue—are evicted, she doesn't know where they're going to go.

Sarah's family is not alone. Advocates estimate that 7,000 tenants, many like Sarah and her family, have eviction hearings scheduled between now and January—7,000 families.

Premier, why are you focusing on evicting as many tenants as quickly as possible in a pandemic—over the holidays, no less—instead of doing everything in your power to help tenants stay housed and weather the storm? Will you immediately reinstate a ban on evictions?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question. The member will know that cases are, of course, split between both issues with respect to tenants seeking recourse with respect to landlords and the opposite. Of course, that is the point of an independent adjudication system, that it takes a look at the issues brought before it, whether they're brought before it by a tenant who has an issue with a landlord or a landlord with a tenant.

We have increased the number of adjudicators so that these issues could be dealt with quicker and fairer. Mr. Speaker, I have every confidence in the non-partisan professionalism of the Landlord and Tenant Board to do the work that is required to deal with tenants fairly, to deal with landlords fairly. That is the hallmark of a non-partisan adjudication system. The Landlord and Tenant Board does it well and has done a good job even during COVID.

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Premier. Many times in this Legislature, we've heard the government stand and defend the use of proper process. In fact, I

think it was just called "procedural fairness," Mr. Speaker. Well, procedural fairness is good for the government when they're defending the process that will help reward their friend and donor Charles McVety. But since forming government in 2018, the government has circumvented the proper, procedurally fair land use planning process in this province at least 33 times through ministerial zoning orders. Instead of adhering to the independent planning process in municipalities, consulting with residents and communities, with stakeholders and groups of interest, they've fast-tracked development applications of their choosing. They're hand-picking the planning lottery winners, and it has got to stop.

When will the government stop playing politics and follow their own advice about the importance of independent processes?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Referred to the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Mr. Parm Gill: I want to thank the member opposite for that question. Mr. Speaker, as I've pointed out a number of times in this House, every single ministerial zoning order that has been issued by the minister has been at the request of the municipality unless the lands are provincially owned. The examples of these projects include allowing outdoor patio expansions in Toronto, a medical innovation park in Oro-Medonte that will make PPE, and the construction of modular supportive housing units in Toronto. In all, our MZO's are accelerating 3,700 long-term-care beds, building 720 affordable homes, 100 supportive units, almost 16,000 much-needed market-price homes. We're doing all of this while creating 26,000 jobs. We will not apologize for this.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member for Orléans for supplementary.

Mr. Stephen Blais: The parliamentary assistant said that all of their orders were done in consultation with municipalities or at their request. This morning, the mayor of Aurora, Tom Mrakas, issued a statement denying that the town was consulted during that MZO process.

1130

Mr. Speaker, the government is issuing MZO's that put agricultural land in Vaughan at risk, that put provincially significant wetlands in Pickering at risk. My fear is that they're going to put class 1 farmland in Ottawa at risk next.

Thousands of voices have joined together to urgently ask the government to stop attacking Ontario's precious wetland and green space. Mr. Speaker, through you: When will the government start listening to Ontarians and stop the sneak attack on agricultural land, wetland and green space?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I look over to the government House leader for a response.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, the land in Aurora, of course, is owned by the province of Ontario. If the mayor of Aurora is unhappy with a close to 200-bed long-term-care home that is coming there, I would suggest to the mayor of Aurora that Stouffville and many other communities would be happy to get that.

But we'll take no lessons in environmental protection from the member opposite. I will say to the member opposite that my family was one of the first families to put an environmental conservation easement across 60 acres of prime agricultural class 1 farmland in the town of Stouffville, one of the first in favour of the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, in an area that was pristine class 1 farmland. In the 15 years since that, under the leadership of the Liberals—or lack thereof—that 60 acres of farmland is surrounded by housing, because on 17 separate occasions that government, under that leadership, invaded the greenbelt, Mr. Speaker.

We have always protected them. Every time we have worked on MZOs, it has been with the consent and approval of the local municipality.

RETIREMENT HOMES

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question is to the Premier. Today's report by the auditor confirms what families have known for years: The system for regulating retirement homes in Ontario and protecting seniors who live in them is badly broken. In Hamilton and Niagara, we have seen this for years, Mr. Speaker, where the Martino family has been allowed to operate homes despite repeated violations. The auditor tells us—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock. I'm hearing some feedback from the government side. I would ask that that would cease so that we can hear the question from the honourable member from the opposition.

I will return back to you and I'll give you a few extra moments to ask your question.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Start again, Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Start again now. Yes.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you, Speaker; I appreciate that. The government is particularly sensitive this morning, but I'll try and get this important question in.

The system for regulating retirement homes in Ontario and protecting seniors who live in them is badly broken. In Hamilton and Niagara, we have seen this for years, where the Martino family has been allowed to operate homes despite repeated violations. The auditor's report this morning tells us that this government's retirement homes regulatory authority turns a blind eye to red flags.

Mr. Speaker, at what point will the government fix this broken system?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Referred to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Todd Smith: On behalf of Minister Cho, the minister responsible for seniors, I know we're thankful for the Auditor General's report this morning, the information that she has passed along to us and the analysis that has been done. I can tell you that our government is committed to improving the lives of seniors and providing supports and resources to them so that they can live independently.

To the question that was posed by the member opposite, Ontario is committed to helping older adults stay healthy, active and socially connected. I know Minister Cho has started a comprehensive review of the Retirement Homes Act, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General's report and recommendations will help inform that review that's currently under way.

In the summer of 2019, the government conducted broad province-wide consultations with older adults and their family members, caregivers and support organizations. I'll have more to add in the supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: The auditor's findings should not be news to anyone, much less the Ford government. Hamilton's Martino homes violated the law for years, running retirement homes infested with bed bugs, cockroaches and broken bathrooms. At one point a resident in a Martino residential home was found tied to a radiator. At another, a resident was abandoned and forgotten when the home had to be evacuated. Licences were only pulled when the media reporting—like at the Spectator—drew attention to just how appalling things were here.

So why has the Ford government spent so much time protecting these for-profit private operators and so little time protecting seniors who have to live in these homes?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the member opposite for raising this issue, and thanks to the Auditor General again for her report this morning. We look forward to looking at this report more thoroughly over the coming days.

We do know that there has been a problem in our retirement homes, and that's after 15 long years of being in the wilderness, actually, with the previous Liberal government. In keeping an eye on these situations, Minister Cho has said that he is conducting a comprehensive review of the situation. We know that the RHRA has a risk-based approach when it comes to inspections, and this ensures that the focus is on the homes that need it most. This includes routine inspections, as well as homes where additional compliance support is required as well.

So the province continues to diligently monitor the situation in our retirement homes, and Minister Cho is committed to stepping up those inspections.

DENISE JONES

Ms. Jill Andrew: I rise today to request unanimous consent for a moment of silence to recognize the life of Denise Jones, a local and international cultural icon who passed away recently.

Denise, co-founder of Jones and Jones Productions and Jambana One World Festival, was a formidable force of artistic and sartorial nature who championed Black, Caribbean and, especially, Jamaican arts, culture and entertainment. Denise is survived by her husband, Allan; sons, Jesse and Jerimi; her sister Devan; brother, Gary; and her mother, Louise. She will forever remain unforgettable to us and all of those she mentored, and her legacy will live on.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Toronto–St. Paul’s is seeking unanimous consent to pay respect to the individual who has passed away. Agreed? Agreed. Please stand.

The House observed a moment’s silence.

DEFERRED VOTES

BETTER FOR PEOPLE,
SMARTER FOR BUSINESS ACT, 2020
LOI DE 2020
POUR MIEUX SERVIR LA POPULATION
ET FACILITER LES AFFAIRES

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

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

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): We have a deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 213, An Act to reduce burdens on people and businesses by enacting, amending and repealing various Acts and revoking a regulation.

The bells will ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. Prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1140 to 1210.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The vote was held on the motion for third reading of Bill 213, An Act to reduce burdens on people and businesses by enacting, amending and repealing various Acts and revoking a regulation.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The eyes are 52; the nays are 35.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I declare the motion carried.

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

Third reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): There being no further business at this time, this House stands recessed until 1 o’clock.

The House recessed from 1211 to 1300.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 229, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes / *Projet de loi 229, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter, à modifier ou à abroger diverses lois.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Pursuant to the order of the House dated November 23, 2020, the bill is ordered for third reading.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ANNIVERSARY OF THE STATUS
OF WOMEN REPORT

ANNIVERSAIRE DU RAPPORT
SUR LA SITUATION DE LA FEMME
AU CANADA

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I rise today to honour a very important anniversary. Fifty years ago today, December 7, 1970, the groundbreaking Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada was tabled in Parliament.

Today, it’s easy to forget that not that long ago, women had few rights and little economic opportunity. But Canada in the 1960s was a time of change. The civil rights movement was at the forefront of national discourse, and with that came mounting pressure to advance women’s equality. More and more women were interested in pursuing goals outside the home, like higher education and employment, beyond the socially acceptable roles for women at that time. Stay-at-home moms were demanding proper recognition for their work and greater sharing of responsibilities between men and women. Women were demanding a seat at the table and were not backing down.

Leurs efforts inlassables ont porté leurs fruits.

In 1967, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada was officially created, with a mandate to “inquire into and report upon the status of women in Canada, and to recommend what steps might be taken by the federal government to ensure for women equal opportunities with men in all aspects of Canadian society.”

The report was released on this day in 1970. To say that it was trailblazing would be an understatement. It included 167 recommendations, largely legislative changes, that addressed critical issues for women, such as poverty, family law, the Indian Act and the need for a federal representative for women.

Le rapport a été considéré comme le point de bascule vers une deuxième phase du mouvement de libération des femmes.

The Ontario Committee on the Status of Women was established to ensure implementation of the recommendations in our province.

In the years to come, changes to laws regarding pensions, family law reform, child care and expansion of human rights protections would be traced to the spirit of the commission.

Speaker, later today, I will be virtually attending an event hosted by our province's Lieutenant Governor, the Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, to celebrate this important milestone in our history. But we will also be discussing the work that lies ahead to ensure the equality and empowerment of women and girls in our province.

The past year has been difficult on all Ontarians, but we know that COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on the social and economic well-being of women.

I would like to assure Ontarians that we are committed to ensuring that women are not left behind as we look forward to reopening the province's economy. This was a focus before the pandemic, and COVID-19 has only made that work more important.

Our government wants to build a province where every woman and girl is empowered to succeed, with their choices supported and sustained by a society that provides equal access to economic and social opportunities. That's why this year, our government will be investing \$4.6 million in the Women's Economic Security Program and \$2.2 million in the Investing in Women's Futures Program. These investments provide crucial funding to organizations that help low-income women gain the knowledge, skills and experience to transition to the labour market successfully and increase their economic security.

In our recent budget, we announced an investment of an additional \$181 million in employment services and training programs to connect workers in industries most affected by COVID-19 with industries facing a skills shortage. Thanks to the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development and the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, we are helping these sectors, and these women, find new employment.

Speaker, we have heard many times about the important role child care plays in helping get more women into the workforce. This was an area of focus in the status of women report 50 years ago, and it is still an area of focus today. I want to commend the Minister of Education for taking this issue seriously and working to ensure that during the pandemic, child care was available to our front-line heroes: PSWs, nurses, doctors, shelter workers, grocery store clerks and many more who stood up for Ontario during the pandemic. They deserve all of our gratitude.

L'autonomie et la sécurité économiques peuvent avoir de nombreuses significations différentes.

It means increasing the share of women in leadership positions. It means training programs that focus on employment, pre-employment, pre-apprenticeship and entrepreneurship specifically for women. It means increasing women's representation in traditionally male-dominated fields, such as science, technology, engineering

and the skilled trades. It means supporting mothers and the child care sector in coping with the challenges of the pandemic. And it also means taking action to address gender-based violence in a focused and sustained way.

We can give women the opportunities and tools to succeed, but if they don't feel safe at home or at work, they cannot and will not be successful.

Speaker, I have spoken extensively on this issue in the past month, but it is something worth repeating at every opportunity: Every woman and every Ontarian deserves to live free of harm and abuse and violence, and deserves to be and feel safe. We need to stand up against gender-based violence and abuse in all its forms. We need to be loud and intentional when we denounce domestic violence, human trafficking and sexual assault. And we must work together—every single person—to take action when we see it occurring. It is never okay, and it can never be tolerated or normalized.

I want to thank all of my colleagues in this House for standing up against gender-based violence. This is not a partisan issue; it is a human issue.

Speaker, I would be remiss if I didn't speak of how important this work is for minorities, especially Indigenous women. Unfortunately, Indigenous women in Ontario are over three times more likely to be murdered than other women, and Indigenous women in Canada between the ages of 15 and 24 are three times more likely to experience violence than non-Indigenous women.

A sad truth is, until 1985, First Nations women lost their status when they married non-Indigenous men, while men who married non-Indigenous women kept their status and were able to transfer their status to their non-Indigenous wives. It was only last year that many of those women and their descendants who lost their status before 1951 were eligible to get it back, and sexism is still woven throughout the Indian Act. We have a long way to go.

Speaker, the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls made it clear that more work needs to be done to protect First Nation, Inuit and Métis people in Canada. Our government established the Indigenous Women's Advisory Council to help us do just that. Eleven incredible Indigenous voices are providing our government with their expertise on serious issues such as human trafficking; child, family and youth well-being; and Ontario's response to the final report.

I want to thank the Minister of Indigenous Affairs for being a strong partner and advocate for Indigenous peoples, including women and girls.

1310

Speaker, we need to all be working for women in Ontario and Canada to ensure that each woman and girl has the same opportunities as men and boys. We need to let our present and future generations know that women can do anything they set their minds to. I know we have our work cut out for us, but we are up for the challenge, just as the members of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women were 50 years ago.

Notre gouvernement est aux côtés des femmes et des filles de tout l'Ontario.

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

Ms. Jill Andrew: I'm honoured to stand in this House today to speak on behalf of women-identifying Ontarians and our many allies as we reflect on the 50th anniversary of the report on the status of women in Canada.

I wanted to start by putting on record my thoughts on some of the women who have placed their names on ballots to make life better for women in their communities. Elected to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in 1990, the Honourable Zanana Akande was the first Black woman to be elected to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and the first Black woman to serve as a cabinet minister, as Minister of Community and Social Services in Ontario under the NDP government.

Minister Zanana Akande led important social welfare reform, overseeing funding for food banks, increasing the shelter allowance. She also helped lead the charge for Ontario's first mandatory employment equity legislation, which helped break economic barriers for women. One of her quotes out of office, when she received the keys to the city of Toronto, was, "We don't come alone, we don't live alone—I think the only thing we do alone is leave."

Of course, Rosemary Brown has also been described as the politician whose personal experiences of racism and sexism fuelled her passion, international advocacy efforts and lifelong fight for equality and human rights. As many would know, she became the first Black woman in Canada to sit in a provincial Legislature and also ran for the leadership of the federal New Democratic Party in 1975. She made history there as well, being the first Black woman to run for leadership of a federal political party. To quote Rosemary Brown: "We must open the doors and we must see to it that they remain open, so that others can pass through," because "until all of us have made it, none of us have made it."

I'd be remiss if I didn't also mention Dr. Jean Augustine, who was appointed as the first Fairness Commissioner for Ontario in 2007 and was the first Black woman elected to the House of Commons. One of her quotes that I absolutely love is, "The seeds of a fruitful society are sown in the minds of its youth." Dr. Augustine was also the author of the motion that provided us with Black History Month across Canada in February.

I'm also going to mention Dr. Bette Stephenson, who was Ontario's first woman Minister of Labour, first woman Minister of Education, first woman president of the Ontario Medical Association—too many firsts to list.

All of these women are women I look up to. Some of them I didn't know; some of them I do know, but I believe that they all came here to make the world, Ontario and Canada better for women and girls.

In this time that we all have in this House as women, we need to ensure that our actions here are making it better for women and girls and for BIPOC communities, disabled communities, communities who are furthest from power, as I've said over and over again in this House, who need a seat at the table, who need an advocate, who need to know that people here are listening. I cannot overstate the

importance of a "she-covery," or, as I would say more inclusively, a "we-covery"—because when we all recover from COVID-19, when we are all on a trajectory to excellence, all of us are better for that.

Days ago we learned that, since November, there were about 116,000 fewer jobs in Ontario compared to one year earlier, and that 85,000 of these jobs lost were held by women.

I want to wrap up in the last bit in saying things that I've said a million times here in this House.

We must address poverty and the way in which legislation that, frankly, this government puts forth literally legislates poverty and legislates anything but women's liberation.

We need a provincial child care strategy right here in Ontario, in Toronto. Toronto has the highest child care costs. I know my friend and colleague Doly Begum, the MPP for Scarborough Southwest, does incredible work on this file. We cannot have women's economic liberation without child care.

I want to spend some time—32 seconds—also speaking to educators, to PSWs, to our front-line health care workers, who are all disproportionately women and, frankly, also many marginalized and racialized women. They need pay. They need pay equity. They need to be able to cover the roofs over their heads and the food on their plates.

And I'll be blue in the face saying here that we need a gender equity strategy in Ontario.

We need to ensure that Ontario is actually a place where women can thrive—and currently, they are not.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: It is an honour to rise in the House today, on behalf of my constituents of Scarborough–Guildwood, in recognition of this significant milestone. Fifty years after the report on the status of women was released, we have made considerable strides in some areas, but progress has been lacking in others. The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified many of these areas.

Affordable, accessible child care is necessary to enable women to fully participate in the labour force. In light of the recent federal economic statement, I urge the Ford government to work with the federal government and their counterparts to finally make universal child care and early learning a reality in Ontario and Canada. Child care is a key component of the she-covery. The pandemic disproportionately impacted women with school-aged children. Canadian women are at risk of losing decades of hard-won gains in the workplace as a result. We must work to ensure that women do not lose the gains of the past 50 years and, even more recently, in the labour force, due to COVID-19.

Careers in STEM, trades, business and, yes, politics and government must be open to women equally.

Recently, federally, we reached 100 women in Parliament due to two Toronto by-elections, and we have to keep going.

Women still face violence, misogyny and sexual harassment.

Unfortunately, early action by this government was to cancel the volunteer table on sexual violence and harassment.

It's important to note that yesterday, we mourned the loss of 14 women who were killed by actions of misogyny in the École polytechnique massacre in 1989.

It is necessary that we all work to create a society where women are enabled to grow up and pursue whatever path they choose, so investments in STEM education and career opportunities are a must.

I call on the government to enact the Pay Transparency Act immediately to support women's economic equality.

We also need to recognize that women with intersecting identities face unique challenges and that gains have not been experienced equally amongst all women. The government needs to make investments in entrepreneurship funds for Black, Indigenous and other women of colour, bring Ontarians with disabilities above the poverty line, and create opportunities for education and for youth so that all girls and women can be brought into the she-covey.

This 50th anniversary is an important milestone, but we have many miles to go.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's an honour to rise to mark the 50th anniversary of the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada.

In their assessment of women in Canada's economy, quality of life for women and state of child care, the conclusions in the report 50 years ago are eerily similar to what women face 50 years later. Pay equity is still a major issue that has not been solved. Affordable, available, quality child care is still a major barrier to access for full economic opportunities for women. And barriers still exist for women, in particular Black, Indigenous and women of colour, to participate in all sectors of our economy.

1320

Speaker, 50 years ago, the women who sat on the commission's table certainly could not have predicted the world we are experiencing today, but I'm sure they would see the challenges that we face in this pandemic as highlighting the need to build back smarter for all women in Ontario.

Our recovery must put women at the centre and must include major investments in schools and child care so that children are not at risk and women's work is not disproportionately impacted by the disruption of searching for affordable, safe and available child care.

Women must be at the forefront of recovering from the she-cession we face. And women will continue to lead and be at the forefront of building a greener and more caring Ontario.

We owe it to our children and our grandchildren to emerge from this pandemic leaving behind a livable planet and a more caring Ontario.

PETITIONS

ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Jamie West: Myles Keaney died from an opioid overdose. It started with one cross as a monument in

Sudbury; now there are more than 106. These petitions were collected on behalf of his sister Brittney Sandul. It's called "Preventing Overdoses in the North."

"Whereas Ontario" has experienced "more than 2,200 opioid-related deaths in 2020;

"Whereas opioid-related deaths are up 25% in northern Ontario compared to 2019;

"Whereas death rates in northern Ontario are almost double what they are in southern Ontario;

"Whereas northern Ontario has fewer health resources to handle the opioid crisis than southern Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to declare the opioid crisis a public health emergency in northern Ontario and commit to funding local evidence-based initiatives such as harm reduction strategies, awareness programs, anti-stigma training, residential treatment, and overdose prevention services, including a supervised consumption site in Greater Sudbury."

I agree with this petition. I affix my signature and give it to the Clerk.

ANTI-SMOKING INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank youth from all over the province. This one comes from the Perth county area. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

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

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

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

CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank all my constituents across Scarborough Southwest who sent their concerns and signed this petition and gave it to us.

This petition is called “Remove Schedule 6 from Bill 229.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s 36 conservation authorities have developed a deep understanding of local ecosystems and how to best protect them;

“Whereas restricting the powers of conservation authorities weakens environmental protections, puts more power into the hands of private developers, and leaves Ontarians at risk; and

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

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to preserve the vital role of conservation authorities in local land use planning and permitting, and to support the continued delivery of a broad range of programs as directed by conservation authorities.”

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

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Catherine Fife: I’d like to thank Pierce Family Vision for collecting these signatures. They’re asking for a timetable and a process for renewed negotiations. This petition is entitled “Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government has underfunded optometric eye care for 30 years; and

“Whereas optometrists now subsidize the delivery of OHIP-covered eye care by \$173 million a year; and

“Whereas COVID-19 forced optometrists to close their doors, resulting in a 75%-plus drop in revenue; and

“Whereas optometrists will see patient volumes reduced between 40% and 60%, resulting in more than two million comprehensive eye exams being wiped out over the next 12 months; and

“Whereas communities across Ontario are in danger of losing access to optometric care;

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

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately establish a timetable and a process for renewed negotiations concerning optometry fees.”

I fully support this petition and will deliver it to the Clerk’s desk.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I bring this petition on behalf of Family Council Network 4 Advocacy, who are committed to improving the lives of Ontario residents in long-term care. This petition reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

I fully support this petition and will affix my signature to it.

FRONT-LINE WORKERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Adele Fawcett from Capreol in my riding for this petition.

“Make PSW a Career....

“Whereas there has been a shortage of personal support workers (PSWs) in long-term care and home care in Ontario for many years;

“Whereas Ontario’s personal support workers are overworked, underpaid and underappreciated, leading to many of them leaving the profession;

“Whereas the lack of PSWs has created a crisis in LTC, a broken home care system, and poor-quality care for LTC home residents and home care clients;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“Tell Premier Ford to act now to make PSW jobs a career, with full-time employment, good wages, paid sick days, benefits, a pension plan and a manageable workload in order to respect the important work of PSWs and improve patient care.”

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

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the Family Council Network 4 Advocacy, who are committed to improving the lives of Ontario residents in long-term care, for this petition. This petition is called “Time to Care Act—Bill 13.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: This is a very important petition I’ve received from Esther-Ann Davies. She sent us several hundred signatures on the Time to Care Act, Bill 13.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

I fully support this petition and urge the government to pass my Bill 13. I sign it and give it to the usher to deliver to the table.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Catherine Fife: This petition is entitled “Support Ontario Families with Autism.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

“Whereas the new funding caps are based on age and income, and not the clinical needs of the child;

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

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

I fully support this petition and will make sure that it gets to the table.

ADDICTION SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Christina Pisanti, who gathered these petitions in memory of her brother Myles Keaney, who died of an overdose in Sudbury.

“Prevent Overdoses in the North.

“Whereas Ontario is expecting more than 2,200 opioid-related deaths in 2020;

“Whereas opioid-related deaths are up 25% in northern Ontario compared to 2019;

“Whereas death rates in northern Ontario are almost double what they are in southern Ontario;

“Whereas northern Ontario has fewer health resources to handle the opioid crisis than southern Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to declare the opioid crisis a public health emergency in northern Ontario and commit to funding local evidence-based initiatives such as harm reduction strategies, awareness programs, anti-stigma training, residential treatment, and overdose prevention services, including a supervised consumption site in Greater Sudbury.”

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

GASOLINE PRICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Louise Baliski, who sent me these petitions. It reads as follows:

“Whereas northern Ontario motorists continue to be subject to wild fluctuations in the price of gasoline; and

“Whereas the province could eliminate opportunistic price gouging and deliver fair, stable and predictable fuel prices; and

“Whereas five provinces and many US states already have some sort of gas price regulation; and

“Whereas jurisdictions with gas price regulation have seen an end to wild price fluctuations, a shrinking of price discrepancies between urban and rural communities and lower annualized gas prices;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“Mandate the Ontario Energy Board to monitor the price of gasoline across Ontario in order to reduce price volatility and unfair regional price differences while encouraging competition.”

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

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Dustin Bedard-Knoll, who is from Coniston in my riding, for this petition.

“MS Specialized Clinic in Sudbury ...

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

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

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

They petition the Legislative Assembly 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.

DOCUMENTS GOUVERNEMENTAUX

M^{me} France Gélinas: J’aimerais remercier M^{me} Yollande Lalonde de Chelmsford dans mon comté pour ces pétitions.

Les « Accents en français sur les cartes de santé de l’Ontario...

« Alors qu’il est important d’avoir le nom exact des personnes sur les cartes émises par le gouvernement, » telle « la carte santé...;

« Alors que plusieurs personnes francophones ont des accents dans l’épellation de leur nom », comme moi;

« Alors que ... le ministère de la Santé » a « confirmé que le système informatique de l’Ontario ne permet pas l’enregistrement des lettres avec des accents; »

Ils demandent à l’Assemblée législative de s’assurer « que les accents de la langue française soient inclus sur tous les documents et cartes émis par le gouvernement de l’Ontario », et ce, « avant le 31 décembre 2020. »

J’appuie cette pétition, monsieur le Président. Je vais la signer et l’envoyer à la table des greffiers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECT, SUPPORT AND RECOVER FROM COVID-19 ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2020 LOI DE 2020 SUR LA PROTECTION, LE SOUTIEN ET LA RELANCE FACE À LA COVID-19 (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Phillips moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 229, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes / Projet de loi

229, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter, à modifier ou à abroger diverses lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Minister of Finance.

Hon. Rod Phillips: I will be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member from Willowdale.

A little over a month ago, I stood in the Legislature to introduce Ontario’s Action Plan: Protect, Support, Recover. Today, for the third time, I rise to speak on the legislation to enact our government’s plan to protect the people of Ontario from the global pandemic, our plan to provide additional support for people and jobs, and our plan to lay the groundwork for a strong economic recovery.

Ontario’s Action Plan: Protect, Support, Recover is a budget that includes a lot of input from people and businesses around Ontario. Through 2020, our government heard from more than 8,000 individuals, organizations, members of organized labour and businesses as part of numerous consultations, including the Ontario Jobs and Recovery Committee’s ministerial advisory councils and the 2020 budget consultations.

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs held pre-budget hearings in January 2020, hearing from people across the province and receiving 146 written submissions. The committee again held 25 public hearings related to the sectoral impacts of COVID-19 in June, July and August, during which more than 500 witnesses made presentations and over 130 written submissions were received from individuals or groups who did not appear at the committee. This led to the most broad-based consultation for any Ontario budget.

Mr. Speaker, we took these consultations to heart. Since introducing the budget, we have heard from people across the province who have told us that our priorities—protect and support and recover—are also their priorities. These include health care workers who are protecting us, small business owners we are supporting, and parents and workers who are counting on us to lay the foundation for economic recovery.

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Of course, at the beginning of this year, no one could have anticipated how COVID-19 would impact us all, and early in 2020, our intention was to deliver a budget as we would have traditionally, in the spring. However, as we all know COVID-19 disrupted the lives of Ontarians in an unprecedented fashion.

So, instead, in March we released a one-year economic and fiscal outlook, the first phase of Ontario’s Action Plan: Responding to COVID-19. Ontario was the first jurisdiction in Canada to release a fiscal outlook that reflected the impacts and our plans for the COVID-19 crisis. That urgent initial response was focused on ensuring that everyone could be as safe and healthy as possible while putting in place supports for people and for businesses.

For the better part of this year, we have been surrounded by uncertainty. But one thing throughout that period has been certain, and that is our government’s commitment to do whatever it takes to get Ontario through the pandemic. This budget, the latest phase of our action

plan, does just that. It builds on that important early work by setting out \$45 billion in support over three years to provide more resources to strengthen front-line health care, support people and employers, and lay the groundwork for Ontario's recovery. That is why, as I rise again today, I urge all of our colleagues in this place to support that plan. We must work together to fight the second wave of COVID-19.

Just as we must all count on each other to physically distance, to stay home when sick, to practise good hand hygiene, we must also work together in this place to protect and support the people of Ontario and lay the foundation for a strong recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. I hope that we can count on all members to support the bill.

Mr. Speaker, our plan is based on three pillars: protect, support, recover. First, we are taking steps to protect people from the deadly virus by increasing our investments to combat COVID-19 to \$15.2 billion. Our second pillar is support: We will build on our early relief to provide \$13.5 billion in direct support and \$11.3 billion in cash flow support. And third, we are removing barriers to recovery by providing \$4.8 billion to create jobs now and in the future as our economy recovers. Ontario's action plan is a \$45-billion, three-year response to COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, "protect" is the first pillar of our plan, because nothing is more important than ensuring the health of Ontarians. We will invest \$351 million to create over 3,100 more hospital beds and \$572 million into our hospital system to ensure that we have the capacity to deal with COVID-19, whatever the circumstances. We will support our robust testing network with \$1.4 billion as we continue to ramp up testing and contact tracing through 174 assessment centres, 170 pharmacies and 49 community-based testing and mobile sites. We are leading the country, with nearly 6.2 million tests completed since March. That is more tests than were completed in all the Canadian provinces and territories combined. I'll say that again: more tests than the rest of Canada put together.

Our government led the charge to call on the federal government to approve rapid tests so that people can get results quicker. And in the time since I introduced this legislation just a little over a month ago, we have deployed 98,000 COVID-19 rapid tests to provide faster results in regions of high transmission and rural and remote areas. We will be distributing 1.2 million rapid antigen tests to support screening programs for long-term-care homes and other vulnerable workplaces. These innovative testing options will help to quickly identify and manage outbreaks and help stop the spread of COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, all of us look forward to the day when the federal government and Health Canada have approved the vaccine. And make no mistake: Ontario will be ready when that day comes. We have a robust plan to distribute the vaccine across the province and the infrastructure needed to support those efforts.

While we prepare for COVID-19 vaccination, we continue to be aware that we need to have other protections in place. For instance, we have purchased \$1.1 billion of personal protective equipment. That's 300

million masks, 900 million gloves, 50 million gowns and six million face shields.

Mr. Speaker, we know that COVID-19 affects those who are elderly and immunocompromised more than anyone else.

Our seniors and those who live in long-term-care homes are the most at risk right now. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have made close to \$800 million available to protect our loved ones in long-term care. We know there are staffing challenges and bed shortages, and our government is acting on that. We will invest \$1.7 billion to build more beds and upgrade existing ones. We will move forward to accelerate the building of four facilities for long-term care by 2022, adding 1,280 beds in Mississauga, Ajax and Toronto. In these four pilot projects alone, there are more than double the beds that the previous government built in the last seven years they were in office. And we are looking to the future, as the first province in Canada to commit to increasing direct care for long-term-care residents to an average of four hours a day. This makes us the leader among Canadian provinces, and it's a commitment that I'm sure everyone in this Legislature can support.

As COVID-19 continues to threaten our health, the government will continue to protect the people of Ontario.

We know that COVID-19 has severely challenged families, employers and communities. That is why "support" is the second pillar of our budget. We are making key investments and delivering supports as part of our promise to do whatever it takes to support people and jobs.

We're supporting seniors who need help to remain in their homes, get basic services and stay active. The bill before us today proposes a new Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit for the 2021 tax year that would help tens of thousands of seniors stay in the homes they love longer. The tax credit will be worth 25% of up to \$10,000 in eligible expenses and be available to seniors and their family members, whether they owe taxes or not. This will range from small updates like installing stability bars in showers, mid-sized renovations like installing a ramp, or larger renovations like making the first floor suitable for seniors' living needs. As I've toured the province virtually to talk about the budget, I remember the conversation I had with Linda. Linda, it turns out, is a senior, and she's also an accountant by trade. Linda told me about how her and her friends will be able to take advantage of this, how those who have a taxable income and those who don't have a taxable income will be able to take advantage of these kinds of renovations to stay in the homes that they love. That is something I'm sure all of us can support.

We're also supporting families and students. We've heard from parents that getting the resources they need for at-home and virtual learning can be costly, which is why we are once again providing parents with a measure of relief. Starting November 30, Ontario parents can apply online for another payment of \$200 per child 12 and under and \$250 per child 21 and under with special needs through the Support for Learners program. I'm sure all the

members of the Legislature have heard this from their constituents—I know I have, as well—that this program was much, much needed, and we know that because as of this past Friday, we have surpassed over one million applicants for this program. This is much-needed relief; the people of Ontario understand that, and they appreciate that their government is there to provide it.

Mr. Speaker, this year we have had important conversations about systemic racism, a pernicious form of hatred that doesn't just persist around the world but here in our province as well. Ontario is a place where every person deserves respect and the opportunity to be all that they can be. That's why we are doubling the base funding for the Black Youth Action Plan starting next year, providing an additional \$60 million over the next three years. I had the opportunity to speak to Farley Flex, who is a well-known activist and entertainer—quite famous for his role on Canada's Got Talent—and someone who is truly at the grassroots of the issue. Farley told me what many other people have told me: that this plan's expansion, currently supporting over 1,200 young people, will make a huge difference, a significant difference in terms of supporting people across this province, and particularly Black youth who deserve it.

Small businesses have been amongst the hardest hit by COVID-19. That is why we've worked with our partners in the federal and municipal governments to support them by assisting with rent, personal protective equipment grants and the Digital Main Street program. And our small business support is ongoing, because as the impacts of COVID-19 evolve, our support must as well. That is why, when our government made the difficult decision to impose additional but necessary public health restrictions in some regions, we doubled the support available to eligible businesses to cover the costs associated with property tax and energy bills. We are now providing up to \$600 million in relief to support eligible businesses required to close or that have significant restrictions in services.

Every member of this Legislature should encourage small businesses to apply for relief at ontario.ca/COVIDsupport. If they have any questions, small businesses can call the 1-855 helpline; that's 1-855-216-3090. Just to repeat: Any small business in one of the affected areas that's looking for support can apply for that relief at ontario.ca/COVIDsupport. And if there are any questions, please call the helpline at 1-855-216-3090.

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Mr. Speaker, as COVID-19 continues to create challenges, we will continue to be there to support the people and the businesses of Ontario.

So far, I've spoken about the urgent actions that we're taking to help people and to support jobs, but we can't lose sight of the future, when the world begins to emerge slowly from the grasp of COVID-19. And that is why "recover" is the third pillar of Ontario's action plan. We need to plan now for our future so we can start the work of recovery. We all know that growth in our economy will be required to recover from COVID-19, but we also all know

that there are fundamental barriers to growth that, if left unaddressed, would hold Ontario back once COVID-19 recedes and the world starts to focus on recovery. Our budget does not wait to act.

It is indisputable that the challenges brought on by this pandemic have disproportionately impacted women, and that many of the heavily impacted sectors, such as hospitality and tourism, have a high percentage of female workers. We need to be there for the workers who are most affected, so we are investing and retraining our workers so that they are ready to contribute to the recovery of our province.

The government is investing an additional \$181 million in employment services and training programs to connect workers in industries most affected—like tourism and hospitality—with industries where there remain skills shortages. This includes \$100 million through Employment Ontario for skills training. It also includes \$60 million to help support workers acquire in-demand skills rapidly to support a faster transition to a new job. We are also launching an unprecedented skilled trades strategy, breaking the stigma, simplifying the system, and encouraging employer participation in training and apprenticeships. Taken together, these initiatives will help job seekers, particularly those hardest hit by COVID-19, to get the skills that they need.

Mr. Speaker, we've also outlined a comprehensive plan to reduce job-killing electricity prices. The price of electricity in commercial businesses, for example, increased by 118% between 2008 and 2019. That is five times the rate of inflation, and it is far, far too much. What it has meant is lost jobs and lost opportunity for people across this province. To protect and create jobs, the excess cost of high-cost electricity contracts signed by the previous government will be funded by the province, starting January 1. Removing these costs from electricity bills will save industrial and commercial employers an average of 14% and 16%, respectively. As a result of our comprehensive plan, Ontario will go from being one of the least competitive jurisdictions for the cost of electricity to among the most competitive—better than the US average and most of the Great Lakes states we compete with for manufacturing and commercial jobs. This will create jobs. This will create growth. This will create opportunity. And this will help drive the economic recovery.

Our plan also reduces taxes on job creators, so that their resources can be invested in hiring more people, expanding their operations, and innovating for long-term growth and prosperity in our province.

Back in March, we raised the exemption on the employer health tax to \$1 million, so that 30,000 small companies would not have to pay this tax on jobs. During our extensive consultations in advance of the budget—consultations that, as I mentioned, were unprecedented in their scope—we heard loud and clear that this measure helped keep workers on the job, and that is why we are proposing to make this permanent. That will mean that, should this bill pass, 90% of Ontario employers will no

longer pay this tax on jobs, and eligible private sector employers will see a savings of \$360 million in 2021-22.

On behalf of Ontario's small businesses, I strongly encourage all members of all parties to support this measure.

Additionally, we are lowering high provincial property tax rates for over 200,000 employers, or 94% of all the business properties in Ontario.

And when I met with the Ontario's Big City Mayors in late November, I spoke to them about our government's additional proposal to provide municipalities with the flexibility to target property tax relief for small businesses based on their community needs—an initiative that, like so many of our initiatives, came through the consultation. In this case, it came from small business and came from municipalities.

Ontario has also offered to match these municipal property tax reductions by further reducing taxes on jobs. I have to say, Mr. Speaker, there has been an overwhelming response from municipal leaders and from small businesses to this initiative—because our municipalities know that now is the time to support our small businesses. This measure will provide small businesses across the province with as much as \$385 million in municipal property tax relief.

Taken together, these measures will put money into the pockets of business owners—money that can go towards jobs and ultimately helping our communities and our families thrive in this province.

Since the introduction of the budget, there have literally been hundreds of businesses and dozens of municipalities that have thanked the government for these initiatives. They understand the importance not just of putting forward initiatives for today but of putting forward initiatives for the future. And we can say thank you back to them. These ideas came from small businesses and municipalities, and we will continue to listen, as we look forward to our spring budget, to those important stakeholders in our communities across the province.

Mr. Speaker, I think, particularly during COVID-19, we've all participated in enough video conferences to know that reliable, high-speed Internet and cellphone service is mission critical in 2020. Yet for too many households in Ontario—by one estimate, 12% of our population—high-speed, reliable Internet and cellphone service are simply not available due to the lack of adequate broadband infrastructure. Our government is changing that. We are topping up our initial investments in our historic Improving Connectivity for Ontario program. Over the next four years, we've committed an additional \$680 million to the next phase of our plan, bringing our total commitment to rural broadband expansion to nearly \$1 billion. The last time I stood in this House, we called on the federal government to also fulfill their commitments. Since then—and I compliment them—we have seen them make some further investments in this important infrastructure. This is the infrastructure of the 21st century, and our vision is to see every farm, every business

and every home connected by reliable, high-speed broadband. We call on our federal partners to continue to show their commitment, and our government will continue to show ours.

As we look to the future and as we still deal with global uncertainty, we will continue to look to initiatives that will help support Ontario in its recovery.

Since the onset of COVID-19, our collaboration with the federal government has delivered real and meaningful support to the people of Ontario, and I'm pleased to see that some of the investments that the federal government announced in the fall statement respond very directly to some of the requests that Ontario has made. Just to highlight three of them—they have made long-overdue but new investments in the improvement of water quality for Indigenous communities; they've announced the removal of sales tax on masks and face shields, which was a very specific request that we made to support, again, Ontarians and businesses during this time; and they have made some progress towards the evolution of the Fiscal Stabilization Program, which was a specific ask of the provincial Premiers to help various provinces deal with the challenges that we're facing now and in the past.

I must say that they missed a number of opportunities, as well. Most notably, despite the unanimous request of provincial Premiers and particularly of Premier Legault and the Council of the Federation, there was no mention, no direction and no funding as it relates to the Canada Health Transfer and all of the Premiers' request to see an immediate 35% of health care spending be captured by the federal government. Why is this so important, and why should all members of the Legislature support this initiative? There was a time when the federal government paid 50% of the health care costs; today, on average, across the country, that percentage is 22%. What that leaves is about a \$28-billion gap between the current request of the Premiers and what the federal government is currently paying. The reason the Premiers are raising it, the reason that they will be meeting with the Prime Minister about this later this week, on Thursday, is because that \$28-billion gap grows to a \$100-billion gap between now and 2040, if the current trajectory is held in place. So this is an area where we expect to have constructive conversations. Of course, we know that there will be disagreement and debate as we deal with other levels of government.

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To be very clear, this is an area of great concern. It is speaking directly to what all Canadians are speaking to, which is the importance of a sustainable, long-range plan for our health care system. We expect that the federal government will see the wisdom of this, and we call on all members of this Legislature, both directly and through their federal parties, to advocate strongly for an increase in the Canada Health Transfer to 35%.

As I said, these will be constructive conversations, I'm sure, and sometimes that does require respectful disagreement. I know that one of the great traditions of this place is respectful disagreement. I trust that all of my colleagues

will agree, though, that that disagreement should be based on a foundation of facts so that we can have legitimate discussions about policy, on which there are legitimate differences between the various parties represented here.

Before I conclude, I do want to correct a few of the errors that seem to have made their way into some of the opposition members' speaking points.

First, contrary to the NDP's assertion, our government is substantially increasing funding for the long-term-care sector. As you'll see on page 183 of the budget, COVID-19-related measures are counted separately for the purposes of transparency, but clearly. Again, I'm sure that the opposition will acknowledge that.

Second, there seems to be some misunderstanding about the nature of federalism and how provincial and federal governments play a role. It's important to remember here that there is only one taxpayer, but that the role of the government of Ontario is to make sure that those Ontario taxpayers—and that Ontario citizens, fundamentally—get their fair share from the federal government. It is true, as I mentioned at committee, that the federal government's one-time payments for COVID-19 represent about 23% of the direct support under Ontario's action plan, but in contrast the federal government only contributes about 7% of what this province will pay on infrastructure this year. Each level of government has an appropriate role to play. Again, as the government—and I'm sure as all of the members of this Legislature—we would want to ensure that the citizens of Ontario receive their fair share of federal government support, particularly during this time.

Third, I'd like to take a moment to explain the purpose of the various contingency funds, which seem to have confused some members of the opposition. They are a tool that allows our government to be nimble amid unprecedented volatility and are now widely emulated by other provinces and territories and, in fact, by our federal counterparts. When we first introduced our plan in March, we indicated that nobody had a crystal ball. We wouldn't have known at that time we'd need \$1.1 billion for personal protective equipment or \$1.4 billion for testing. Perhaps the members opposite have that kind of foresight—and if they do, please share it with us. We wanted to set those dollars aside to make sure that we could be nimble, that we could be agile, that we could make those investments, that the hundreds of millions of masks, that the hundreds of millions of gloves and that the six million face shields would be available when they were needed. As we move forward, we will continue to be agile and continue to respond to the needs in Ontario. We will continue to use these contingencies to ensure that the dollars are available—whether it's hospitals that need our support or communities that need our support or individuals who need our support. We will make no apologies for making sure that the dollars are available, whether it's for vaccines or other supports that are required.

At the same time, we're not going to shrink from the responsibility—and I'm sure nor would the opposition want us to—to ensure that even during these challenging times taxpayer dollars are spent in a responsible manner.

As I've mentioned, collaboration has been a critical element of the success the 14.5 million Ontarians have had so far. It's not easy, and no one is perfect, but that collaboration is the only way forward. It is the way we can beat COVID-19—every family, every business and every level of government working together collaboratively. As the Premier reminds us each day, like clockwork, at his 1:30 press conference—it's usually 1 o'clock; it was 1:30 today—we are all in this together.

So in the spirit of that collaboration, I am asking each and every member of this Legislature—whether it's to support the seniors' tax credit, whether it's to support the dollars for parents, whether it's to support the hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars to support our least fortunate, whether it's to support the doubling of the Black youth action plan; whether it is to support the money for infrastructure, whether it is to support our long-term-care plan—to please support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member for Willowdale.

Mr. Stan Cho: It's my privilege to rise this afternoon to speak once again to Bill 229, the Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act.

Mercifully, we're approaching the end of what I think all members of this House will agree has been a very difficult year.

This government—and credit where it's due, Speaker—with support of members across the aisle, has accomplished a lot this year. Ontarians have risen to the challenge of COVID-19, and their representatives have, for the most part, put partisan politics aside to do what's right to protect Ontarians and support families, businesses and our communities.

There is hope. There's light at the end of this dark, long tunnel that 2020 was—the year of the pandemic. With the incredible work of the scientific community, our health and public health professionals, public servants and the expertise of Canada's military, 2021 may well be the year of the vaccine.

But even as, like many of my constituents, I remain glued to every news story about vaccine developments, health approvals, rollout plans, we must continue to be realistic that this pandemic is far from over.

This government takes that reality very seriously. While the Premier, our ministers and the vaccine task force prepare for one of the largest—if not the largest—vaccination programs in Ontario's history, this government is also taking the crucial steps to continue to protect Ontarians today from this deadly virus, to shore up health care capacity, to protect our long-term-care homes, to safeguard vulnerable populations, and also to support Ontarians throughout economic uncertainty and financial hardship. Budget 2021 does all of these things, and, as has now been said in this House countless times, it begins to look around the corner to what comes next: a gradual return to normal and, importantly, to economic recovery.

I've mentioned in this House before that I understand the role of the opposition is to oppose, and I certainly don't expect members opposite to agree with everything the

government is doing, even in this crucial bill to protect the people we serve. But I have to say, that I've been, so far, disappointed on the debate around Bill 229. While the opposition can disagree with the government's policy or direction or priorities—and, in fact, it is their job to do just that—we shouldn't disagree, as the Minister of Finance just mentioned, on the facts.

Unfortunately, the debate both in second reading and at committee has largely been taken up by members opposite attempting to dispute the facts, instead of debate focused on the substantive issues—the substantive issues such as the real policy decisions that Ontarians expect all of us to debate in good faith.

I'm just going to use one illustrative example. The members opposite have repeatedly claimed for the last 32 days, in this House, in the press, in committee, that the government is sitting on \$9.3 billion of unspent contingency funds—money which, they argue, should be allocated to helping Ontarians. What's troubling is that this claim is untrue. The government is not sitting—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock.

A reminder to all members that you cannot suggest that other members are being untruthful—the member is going to walk that line carefully today, I'm sure.

I'm going to ask you to bear that in mind before I have to call for you to withdraw.

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you, Speaker.

The government is not sitting on \$9.3 billion in unspent contingencies. It clearly shows this, as I have read out verbatim, on page 173 and again on page 187. That's roughly 80% of the \$9.3 billion, illustrated in the budget, to have been allocated as of the budget date. As can be seen on page 187, at the bottom of the page, it says, in black and white, that \$2.6 billion remains in this year's contingency funds.

In fact, that number is now out of date. The contingency today stands at \$2.3 billion because our government drew down an additional \$300 million when Toronto and Peel had to enter the second lockdown. This was the doubling in supports for small businesses, to refresh members' memories, and making sure that we move that money to support them during these difficult times with fixed costs, bringing the total program costs, to date, up to \$600 million. Those are funds that have been drawn down from the contingency funds that I'm speaking about.

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Contingency funds are not just a part of this budget—but part of all governments of all political stripes at all levels, and it's nothing new to the Legislature here. There's always a contingency in the budget, every single year, and at every level of government. This fund allows government to react faster and to unforeseen circumstances.

You'll recall last year, Speaker, that when we had the wildfires that affected much of northern Ontario, this government was able to divert hundreds of millions of dollars in direct relief very quickly, and that came out of the contingency fund.

These contingency funds also allow governments to act and adapt quickly. We can, I'm sure, all agree in this House that government at times doesn't move as quickly as we would like, and certainly not as quickly as regular life in the private sector. Government financing is quite complex, and sometimes it takes multiple levels, multiple processes and sometimes duplication in order to get funds flowing through the doors to the important initiatives and programs and services that people rely on.

Speaker, in March, the Minister of Finance believed that it was prudent to make sure that in a situation such as this, where we don't know what's coming around the corner as it relates to COVID-19, it's important to build in some of that adaptability, some of that fiscal prudence ahead of time. That's why these contingency funds, which are not normal, are unusually high in amount. When the health care front-line workers said, "We need additional PPE," this government was able to react very quickly and provide 900 million gloves, 600 million masks and six million face shields. And when the federal government approached us in the spring and wanted us to be a 40% equity partner on the commercial rent relief program, we were able to adapt and provide 40% of the equity in the form of \$241 million. This is an additional drawdown that came out of the very contingency that I'm speaking of.

It is in this time of uncertainty that prudence is needed, because when we don't know what's coming around the corner and we know that we have to adapt quickly, it doesn't make sense in traditional means of financing through the way that government uses its funds. That's why we put that unprecedented level of prudence into the budget. So having contingency isn't a bad thing. What we should be debating is where that contingency should be spent; not, rather, debating if those funds are being spent at all.

What the opposition claims is that this government is not using the contingency fund to help Ontarians. It's not even that they're claiming that the government is spending the contingency funds on the wrong things; the claim is simply that the funds are unspent—again, the budget shows that they clearly are. The fiscal year also ends in March; in fact, on March 31, 2021. To date, as of December 7, 2020, this government has allocated roughly 80% of the total contingency funds. If you calculate based on the calendar or the fiscal year, we are about 80% of the way to March 31, the end of that fiscal year. In my opinion, that's the very definition of fiscal prudence—moving in step through the fiscal year to adapt to a very uncertain situation.

Something else I find troubling is that the opposition has continued to repeat this claim for 32 days, and we're hearing it again in the chamber today. Speaker, 32 days ago, on November 5, the day the budget was tabled, opposition members and staff were briefed on this very budget. They were briefed on the contingency fund. In fact, there were questions raised in the lock-up about those very funds. The fact that 80% of the contingency funds had been allocated was also explained to them—not by politicians, but by independent public servants. Those are

not politicians who are paid to think along partisan lines. They are the ones who input into this very budget document—the ones who worked to provide those figures and facts for many months. The opposition was briefed on these very figures, and the very questions that I am speaking to now were addressed.

On November 17, I rose in this House at several points throughout the day to explain time and time again that the government is not sitting on \$9.3 billion and how it was important to debate the facts. But it has become clear, over the course of debating Bill 229, that we're not making any progress in terms of this particular debate—it makes me not only disappointed, but it makes me question why. I would love to be debating about where the contingency funds should be spent. That's a productive debate. Instead, we have members saying that they are remaining completely unspent. We can't have a debate when it's not based on those facts.

In fact, even during committee deputations on Bill 229, a member opposite, after a deputation was completed, held up a sign saying "\$9.3 billion remaining," finding it comical. That's the kind of behaviour I wish wasn't happening during this global time of uncertainty. We could have productive debates, not mockery, not using a fact—it's okay to disagree on facts, but to mock the government or to mock the process of democracy is unacceptable. These tactics are—and unfortunately, it hasn't just come from one member.

Interjection.

Mr. Stan Cho: I'm hearing from the member from Waterloo that it's about sensitivity; it's not. It's about getting the most out of our time, here in our parliamentary democracy, at a time when the people of this province really need us.

The government is not sitting on the \$9.3 billion.

And I hope that today and moving forward we can recognize that the FAO reports the members opposite refer to are a snapshot in time. It is important to operate based on the most current snapshot in time, when we are looking at the facts and figures that form the important decisions we are making here at the Ontario Legislature.

Shifting gears to where those funds have gone, what the budget actually does—things I wish we were debating about, such as the \$45 billion of new spending to address the pandemic.

There are some very important measures that are introduced in this budget, not least of which is the \$7.5 billion of new spending for the health care sector. Sometimes in committee and sometimes during debate, we hear talk from the members opposite and the independent members, saying, "There are cuts to health care. There are cuts to long-term care." When you look at the budget documents and the figures, they show quite the contrary.

For example, out of that \$7.5 billion in new spending for health care, we see \$4 billion in 2021-22 and \$2 billion in 2022-23 in flexible funding to address COVID-19. Again, those are health contingencies—\$4 billion next year and \$2 billion the year after that. I certainly hope that we don't continue in this line of debate, where the

members opposite will ask, "Well, where is the \$4 billion being spent?" We don't know yet, because we don't know what's around the corner in 2021-22. That's the point of a contingency. Yes, there are additional contingencies that the member opposite has spoken to, but that's because we don't know how this virus is going to develop into the year after and the year after that.

Some \$572 million has also been invested to support hospitals for costs incurred during the pandemic. I wish we could debate about that, or the \$1.4 billion invested in testing and contact tracing. Just a few minutes ago, I heard the members opposite saying that that's where the money should be going. And it is going to contact tracing, to testing to support our hospitals.

Also part of the budget funding: \$116.5 million to add 766 new beds in hospitals; \$284 million to address the surgical backlog; \$70 million to purchase 5.1 million doses of the flu vaccine; \$1.75 billion to increase long-term-care capacity and build 30,000 new long-term-care beds.

An important point to reiterate that the Minister of Finance mentioned before he left the chamber—Madam Speaker, forgive me for that; I withdraw ahead. When the Minister of Finance addressed the funding in long-term care, what he was saying was that there's COVID-19 funding for the long-term-care sector. Our minister has done an incredible job to make sure that we have the structural changes necessary to have a great system. That funding for COVID-19 for the LTC sector is separate from the pages that the Minister of Finance alluded to. What you'll see on those very pages of 172 and 173 in the line item spending for every ministry is increases every single year from this fiscal all the way out for the next four out years—an increase of not just a few thousand dollars, but of hundreds of millions of dollars. There are billions going into the system.

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For the people watching at home—and I know my mom is one of them—sometimes we get lost in these facts and figures of millions versus billions, but to invest that amount of money into the long-term-care sector says we're very serious about addressing the serious challenges that we know have existed for a long time. And that has been said to death in this House—it's a system that should have been given attention over the last 20 years; it wasn't. So there comes a point when we stop the finger pointing—whoever's fault it was—and we say, "Let's fix this." That's what our minister and that's what this government is doing.

To the people who hear this talk about millions and billions—and to put how much money that is into perspective, let's go away from money for a second. What's the difference between a million and a billion? Yes, a billion is a thousand million, but if we put it in the context of time, a million seconds is a week and a half. A billion seconds is 32 years.

These are unprecedented funds going into a sector that has desperately needed it. I want to commend the Minister of Long-Term Care one more time for really getting to the

root of the underlying problems and thank her wholeheartedly for the work she has done.

There's also \$380 million in this budget to direct financial supports for parents to support the challenges of remote and hybrid learning. This would be a good thing to debate as well, because we can talk about how this helps parents in every single constituency across this province. We heard it when we introduced the first iteration of this program, that parents appreciated this—\$200 for any child under 12 and \$250 under 21 if the child has special needs. This is real dollars in parents' pockets to go towards buying new technology. Maybe your class needed a tablet. Maybe you needed to upgrade your data capacity at home.

This is real relief for parents, and this is just one program introduced in the budget. These are things that I wish we could debate—or \$7 million to TVO and TFO for online educational content creation for elementary grades, or \$13 billion in capital grants to build new schools and expand existing schools.

The pandemic, one day, will be in our rear-view mirror, but let's not forget the pressing needs of our education system before COVID-19. Up and down Willowdale, the Yonge Street corridor, some of my schools were operating at 150% capacity, to the point where you could live in a condo building and see McKee Public School but your kids can't go there. In fact, they get bused out of the riding to go to school because there's no room at McKee, and when the bell rings after school, you get bused right back home. That's not a childhood—you don't have extra-curriculars, you don't have band practice, and you don't have any sports after that. Children deserve that enriching education experience.

This government invested \$13 billion into improving the capital backlog in our schools. This is real relief. This summer, I was so proud to announce, with the Minister of Education, an expansion to McKee Public School, something the parents in Willowdale have been asking for for a very long time. I'm proud that maybe one less person who can see McKee from their balcony will have to take the bus out of the riding to go to school.

There's \$90 million for PPE for staff and students in these schools and \$62.5 million to hire 625 school-focused nurses. This is just in the education sector alone.

I wish we didn't hear the rhetoric about cuts to education. Instead, if we go to pages 172 and 173 in the budget again, the line expenditures in the education ministry will show significant increases every single year—bottom-line fiscal.

Now that the members opposite, I've heard—I'm happy to hear the debate regarding small businesses. If they want to help small businesses, then I would love to debate the very measures in this budget that are helping small businesses.

We haven't really talked about the EHT, and I think the EHT deserves a discussion. Throughout the pandemic—I see some of the members opposite here who joined me in sitting on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. We heard from 522 stakeholders. We heard, time in and time out, that they needed help with

their profit-insensitive taxes and some of their other fixed costs. Sometimes in debate, we hear talk about, "Small businesses need real relief, dollars in their pocket." I want to remind everyone that when it's a profit-insensitive tax reduction, that is absolutely dollars in the pockets of these small business owners. Take the EHT as one example. The EHT is simply a tax on jobs.

I remember when I was running a small business many years ago and I got my first EHT request for remittance. I was shocked. I only had three employees, and I had to pay thousands of dollars as a brand new business for this, for creating those three jobs. I couldn't understand why I was being punished for enriching our economy and just trying to make a buck—actually, not even making a buck at that point; just keeping the lights on, as a new business.

We heard from small businesses saying that they needed help in this particular area. And so, at the time, throughout the summer, the Ministry of Finance introduced a measure to allow the smallest of small businesses, those with payrolls of up to \$490,000 per annum, regardless of whether you have one employee or 10 employees—we allowed a temporary measure for small businesses to pay no EHT. And then we heard throughout our discussions in the committee and otherwise that they would like to see this measure remain permanent, and that's what we did in this budget. Not only did we keep the measure permanent moving forward, but we doubled it from \$490,000 in payroll annually to \$1 million annually.

This is going to help thousands of businesses across our province, because it is getting rid of that tax on jobs. That's real dollars. We also expanded the program to include medium-sized businesses. So if you are a medium-sized business with payroll of \$1 million to \$5 million, you will see an EHT reduction of 50%. This is real relief for the businesses in Niagara Falls, in London, in Nickel Belt, in Hamilton, in Scarborough, in High Park, in Waterloo.

That's not the only tax reduction we introduced. We introduced the BET reduction.

For anyone who has paid a business property tax bill—there should be a university degree granted to understand how this bill works. It's very confusing. It has all these figures and facts. What it boils down to is, businesses are just paying that tax. It's very confusing—the different contributions and the BET, where that goes, and the municipal portion.

We also understand that our municipalities have had a revenue challenge throughout 2020. The Ministry of Finance didn't want to impact the municipal partners—the front lines of our political system out there—during these difficult times, and so we didn't touch the municipal side of the property tax. What we did was normalize an inconsistent tax throughout the province. Different jurisdictions have different levels of provincial BET portions. We normalized that, to 0.88%. What that means is that most businesses are going to see a sizable property tax reduction of up to 30%—a fixed cost, a profit-insensitive cost—all the while not affecting municipal revenue.

Again, these are real relief measures that I know are going to help small businesses.

In the same vein, there is also the small business tax class act, which was introduced in the budget. We heard from jurisdictions such as Toronto, and Mayor Tory, in this case, said that he would love to be able to distinguish between—I don't want to pick specific examples, but a mega-large coffee corporation on one corner doing business against, or competing against, a small mom-and-pop coffee shop on the other corner. The mayor of Toronto asked, "Is there some way we can have a small business tax classification where we could distinguish between those two entities?" That's exactly what we provided. At the discretion of the municipality, the municipality can determine different guardrails for what qualifies as a small coffee shop versus a mega chain coffee shop, and whatever those parameters are, they can implement them, apply a tax savings in property tax to the small business, and the province will match that portion. Again, this is a targeted measure to help the smallest of small businesses, those up and down Main Street that are really suffering.

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Madam Speaker, \$1.5 million towards the Special Implementation Team on Intellectual Property—this is a crucial measure as well, because there will be a day, as we get through COVID-19, when we will look to that economic recovery. When that time is here, and I really hope that time is soon, the world will be competing for a competitive edge. That competition, when we are through COVID-19, is going to be fierce and it's going to be from all over the world. If we want to be competitive here in Ontario and give our small businesses and ourselves an advantage, we have to lay the foundation for that success now. This \$1.5 million towards the Special Implementation Team on Intellectual Property is a crucial step in that.

It's amazing, in my consultations throughout this province, how great Ontario is at encouraging the entrepreneurial spirit of small businesses that start in their mother's basements, that go on to find great success—only to leave Ontario when they hit a certain threshold; or to see the intellectual property go to other jurisdictions around the world that are better at monetizing and incentivizing these companies once they've gotten out of the difficult start-up stage. We need to look towards these opportunities to make sure that we keep that talent here, so we don't have situations—not just with IP, but with companies like Dajcor in Chatham-Kent, which I visited in February, just before the pandemic became a reality here in Ontario. Dajcor is a company that was expanding, and 300 employees were needed to accommodate the growing needs for their business, for their products. This manufacturing company, unfortunately, though, is not opening in Ontario; they're moving to Kentucky, and when asked why, it was a series of reasons—but one of them was also that hydro was simply too expensive in the manufacturing process.

So this budget also addresses that real commercial and industrial relief to hydro—and we've heard it many times in this House—14% to 16%. That's real relief.

When we take all of these measures and we look at it from the macro and look down, what this means is sizable:

tens of thousands of dollars in savings for these very hard-working small businesses throughout a difficult time. Those are the direct supports that you don't have time to get out in your 60-second response during question period.

So I'm encouraged that we are able to discuss this here today. I just hope that we can have that discussion based on other measures in the budget, not about the government not spending the crucial funds when the people of Ontario need them.

Speaker, there's a long list, but I see that I'm running short on time, and so I want to take my attention towards a budget measure—and there are several of them that we haven't spoken about, unfortunately. I want to just pick one in the time I have remaining here, because it is a big budget bill.

Let's talk about credit unions. This is a sector I've gotten to know a lot better in my first few years here in government. What I've come to realize is what a crucial role credit unions play in many of the rural communities throughout our province. Before I got to government, I used a bank; I didn't know what a credit union really was. A credit union is owned by its members and provides incredibly tailored services that preserve the unique nature of our rural communities throughout this great province.

In my great privilege of working as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance—I hope that we will have universal support for this, because when I started looking into the Credit Unions and Caisses Populaires Act of 1994, I didn't hear one opposing view from any independent member or from the NDP saying that this is something we shouldn't be doing. When we talk about economic recovery, updating an act meaningfully that hasn't been updated in 30 years only makes sense.

I mentioned why these credit unions are important, but what is it we're changing in this budget? That hasn't really come up here for discussion. One of the initiatives that we're introducing is principle-based regulation. What does that mean? Well, it means taking away the overly prescriptive guidelines surrounding new innovation. Really, this act has not been updated since 1994. We'll all recall that in 1994, Boyz II Men topped the Top 40 list—a great band. Technology has changed, and there are new banking services online. There's fintech. There's online banking. You can deposit your cheque right from your phone. Why do banks get to have use of these innovative services, yet credit union members don't have access? The principles-based framework will allow credit unions, through the safeguard of a regulatory sandbox, through the regulator, the ability to try out new technologies at a micro-level in their communities, to see what the uptake is, to see if there are any unintended consequences.

It also expands investment powers. It allows credit unions to raise capital more easily, and it allows for governance changes that are less prescriptive, as well.

One other thing that the credit union sector has been required to do is to notify their members of material changes from their branch through mail. This made a lot of sense in 1994 because mail was the main form of communication, and it's written notice. I can't tell you the

last time I got snail mail that wasn't a bill. Really, what we should be saying is, "You're required to communicate material changes to your members."

These changes in the budget will allow that more principles-based regulatory framework, so credit unions can operate as the sophisticated financial entities that they are, and they will be an absolute driving force in our recovery as we move through COVID-19.

Speaker, I'm short on time, so I can't mention some of the other parts of this budget that we have made changes to—that really haven't even had a word uttered in this chamber, unfortunately.

I know that the minister has said it, the Premier has said it and I've said it: Through this pandemic, I certainly appreciate the efforts of our municipal partners and our federal partners, as we had to put partisan games aside. It really wasn't the time for politics, when it comes to a globally uncertain situation like this pandemic. For the large part, we've been able to provide—the process hasn't been perfect—that blanket support from all levels of government, to weather the storm as best as possible.

It's easy to look backwards. It's easy to poke holes when mistakes have been made—and have they been made? Of course; no response to this pandemic around the world has been perfect, unfortunately. But what I would like to see moving forward is an increased collaborative spirit, a spirit of working together and putting aside those partisan games, to deal with where the funds should be spent—not that funds are not being spent. I look forward to that constructive debate not just this afternoon, but as we move forward and through this pandemic—and, again, because I'll remind all the members of this House that we have another budget coming up in just under four months, and I really look forward to that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's interesting to note what the government didn't talk about in this. They certainly didn't talk about schedule 6, which is the major stumbling part of the bill for us. It's interesting that they forgot that they continue to prefer and show deferential treatment to the big box stores like Walmart over Main Street. They forget to say that their PPE assistance is very limited, for only two to nine employees. They forgot to mention that the cap on delivery fees is only available if you're on lockdown or you're not a franchise. They forgot to mention that the hydro support is only available (1) if you're still in business, and (2) it's often tied into the rent—so, again, you're just helping the landlords. Property tax, as well, is often embedded in the rent.

It looks like somebody on that side of the House looked at, "How can we sound like we're helping businesses and do as little as possible?" Why have you forgotten small businesses in the province of Ontario during a pandemic?

Mr. Stan Cho: I'll try to address as much of the member from Waterloo's question as possible in the minute I have. There was a lot in there to unpack, so let's start with the small businesses.

On the one hand she's saying that we're supporting the smallest of small businesses with the PPE grant for up to

under 10 employees, and on the other she's saying we're doing nothing for small businesses. The fact is, we're doing a blanket approach, a coordinated approach with all levels of government to make sure that we protect whoever wherever we can.

When it comes to the big box chains—it was simply the health table and Dr. Williams, who said, "Are you selling essential services or not?" We left that decision to the experts at the health table. If a small business is selling essential services, they are absolutely open.

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This is exactly why our government has introduced those profit-sensitive reductions, those measures that will be permanent—so that as we move through the pandemic, which we know and we hope and we pray is a temporary situation, we will have the foundation in place to make sure that we not only prosper but we thrive once again here in Ontario.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you to the member for Willowdale for going over a lot of things that we haven't had a chance to talk much about here.

One thing that was really striking to me is what has been put forward in the budget in regard to the business education tax. Waterloo region, as other members in this House will know, pay a disproportionate amount of that, sometimes 20% to 30% more than other parts of the province. I was hoping that the parliamentary assistant might be able to explain a little bit more about what the reductions to that flat 0.88% might mean to business owners like Barbara Stevens from my riding, in Kitchener—Conestoga.

Mr. Stan Cho: I remember the member mentioning Barbara Stevens, but I also remember visiting the member and going to Morty's, a restaurant and pub. We had a very robust discussion about what would help that business weather the storm. What we heard time in and time out was, "We need relief when our business is open and when it's not open, when there's profit coming in and when there's not profit coming in"—because in these uncertain times, that wasn't always known.

That's why we introduced measures like the business education tax cut, which is essentially a reduction across the board on the provincial side of the property tax. That's going to mean up to 30% in savings on the fixed costs of property taxes. This is what cities asked for. Mayor Holder of London was pleased to hear this, because London was paying one of the highest provincial portions of that BET. We normalized it, and this is going to mean real savings and dollars back into the pockets of business owners like Barbara Stevens and Morty's.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I was curious to know why neither the finance minister nor the parliamentary assistant talked about schedule 12. In schedule 12, Ontario will do away with the Film Classification Act, where public health experts decide age-based ratings for the movies, and

Ontario will change it with the Film Content Information Act, which means that Ontario will leave it to the exhibitor—the Netflixes, the online services, the streaming etc.—to decide what should be known in the movies. So things like nudity and coarse language and use of tobacco—all of this will be left to the industry. It has been said that this will reduce burden on the industry, but it will put such a huge burden on our health care system, to the tune of \$1.1 billion. Don't take that from me; take it from Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox and Addington public health; Durham public health; county of Lambton; Porcupine; Thunder Bay—all 34 of them are against this. Why are we doing that?

Mr. Stan Cho: I appreciate the question from the member from Nickel Belt. This is an important question.

Certainly, what we have to recognize in addressing smoking, for example—we heard at the committee that there was a concern that certain changes would result in an uptick in youth smoking rates, and we know that has gone down. We also have to recognize that data is now exchanged differently now, and that includes movies. I can't remember the last time somebody put in a traditional form of a movie; it's now done online across borders—it's online streaming. This information is coming from all over the world, so we need to do better; we need to outpace the changes that we are introducing. That's why we are consulting with the film industry to talk about where the source is most efficient when it comes to targeting things like preventing youth smoking. That's why we will continue to consult with the sector, and that's why this budget lays out of the framework to be able to deliver those better outcomes and have those robust discussions that lead to the better conditions that we're asking for.

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

Mr. Michael Parsa: I want to thank the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance for his speech, as well the Minister of Finance. I want to thank them both for taking part in our virtual consultations with my constituents—both of them. Thank you so much for doing that and listening to the concerns of both our residents and, in particular, our small businesses.

I've spoken to you at length about this; all the members here have, at some point: Our small businesses are hurting, and they need all the support they can get. You highlighted some portions in the bill, and I know you ran out of time. I'm wondering if you can elaborate more on what supports are available to small businesses.

And can you please elaborate on what is being provided in this budget for our seniors?

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you to the member from Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill for not just that question, but for his very hard work throughout this pandemic. I know he, too, has been consulting with many small businesses and heard first-hand the relief measures that they need to weather this storm—and those relief measures in this budget have come from those very sources. Politicians don't know small business best; small business owners know small business best.

Time in and time out, we heard, “We need relief on the fixed costs, but we also need relief with broadband.” There are pockets even in York region that have unreliable broadband, let alone in areas like Nickel Belt and in the more rural areas of this province. Really, it's a new way of doing business. Internet infrastructure is as important as any other infrastructure, whether that be roads or water, and that's why this government is announcing \$1 billion in support, to make sure that we support these businesses. Even farmers need broadband connections to operate their equipment in some cases, because the technology has evolved to the point where tractors can be controlled on your phone. This is a necessity, and we're going to continue to—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Further questions?

Ms. Doly Begum: It's ironic to hear the Minister of Finance and the parliamentary assistant speak about protecting Ontario and Ontarians, whereas Bill 229, schedule 6, takes away protection of our environment and takes away power from conservation authorities.

For 80 years, conservation authorities have protected our communities, environment, rivers, lakes, endangered species, drinking water. They protected wetlands and helped prevent flooding.

Why is this government forcefully allowing schedule 6 of Bill 229 and eliminating the power from conservation authorities that have protected our environment for 80 years?

Mr. Stan Cho: This government is absolutely committed to protecting our environment and expanding both the quality and the quantity of the greenbelt.

It's unfortunate, but the last government actually changed the greenbelt 17 times; we have to remember that. It's not just the amount of times they changed it—but we have to look at the quality of what's in the greenbelt.

Now, in my opinion, we should be working to make sure that the quality and the quantity of what's in the greenbelt is better. That's why today's announcement about investing \$30 million to protect wetlands signals our government's seriousness in making sure that we deal with the environmental challenges that we face, preserving the outcomes and the good protection measures against wetlands and flooding that we have from our conservation authorities. That's why we are introducing a series of governance changes—to make sure that we are better focused, have better line of sight when it comes to the public funding that is being spent towards these measures; to make sure that all levels of government, all agencies, boards and commissions and, indeed, government itself can operate as efficiently and effectively as possible with taxpayer money.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I'm here to talk about Bill 229.

As all the members of Ontario's official opposition, the NDP, have been saying, this government falls so short of what people need in this province.

We've been hearing it; we know it—it's in the news and in our communities: Long-term care is in a crisis. There are outbreaks all over our communities, and this government is spending \$100 million less than what was shown in their March outlook. This government is underspending in long-term care in the middle of a crisis.

Our hospitals are in the middle of a crisis, and right now the Ontario Hospital Association has said that they can't even cover the deficits that they've acquired from COVID-19 care in the last while. So, no, this budget is not helping our hospitals.

We've been saying time and time again that this government should have funded a safe return to school, a cap on class sizes—15 kids in a class—to keep our kids, our teachers and their families safe. But the government is not investing in that.

Public health: You haven't even really reversed the cuts in public health that were in your last budget. And quite clearly, small businesses are not getting what they need. Honestly, \$1,000 for PPE? Do you know what I have to say to small businesses in my community? "Don't spend it all in one place"—because \$1,000 doesn't even come close to what businesses need to keep their businesses clean and their customers safe and their communities safe.

1450

And we do believe the FAO. We believe the independent officers of this House. Thank goodness for these independent officers, because apparently that's the only way we can get any accountability or any transparency from this government. So we look forward to those independent reports, and we trust what the Financial Accountability Officer has to say.

It would be, as the member opposite said, great to have a debate about how we could support Ontarians better than this budget.

But what we're here to talk about today, on this side of the House, is schedule 6, because that's all I am hearing about from my constituents. It's all we heard about at committee. This is an important, important concern for Ontarians. And you're not listening.

The government has done this before. It seems to be a pattern of behaviour from you that you thought that the public wouldn't notice. You like to slip objectionable things into omnibus bills—in this case, a budget bill that's supposed to protect, support and recover. Instead, you tried to slip this into a bill, hoping that the public wouldn't take notice. And the public did take notice. Do you know why? Because what we're witnessing is a direct threat to responsible environmental land use planning, a direct threat to conservation authorities and, ultimately, a threat to the greenbelt.

I don't know if the government thinks that the people are stupid; I'm here to say they're not. They may be a little preoccupied, they may be a little busy, trying to keep their businesses afloat, trying to find jobs if they've lost jobs, trying not to be evicted, trying to keep their families safe, trying to visit their loved ones in long-term care. They wake up every morning and just try to survive COVID-19. As the minister said, they work together. They did work

together—and they are—and I'm proud of that, proud of Ontario, proud of the people in my riding.

They trusted the Premier—so they're trusting. Ontarians trusted that the Premier wouldn't be doing something when they didn't have the ability to have all eyes on what the government is doing—that what they said in their press conferences was actually what was happening on the ground. But that trust is broken, because the government has tried to slip an attack on our environmental protections, under the cover of COVID-19, into a budget bill.

The government is not listening, and it's so clear, because they haven't mentioned schedule 6 once this morning, and almost everyone at the committee that we just heard talked about that.

If the government doesn't want to acknowledge or recognize the people who came to committee, let me just mention some of the people who were there who wanted to talk about schedule 6: Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, Conservation Ontario, Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Wildlands League, Credit Valley Conservation, Ontario Headwaters Institute, the town of Ajax—opposed to your MZO. We had the Canadian Environmental Law Association, Crowe Valley Conservation Authority, Grand River Environmental Network, Environmental Defence, World Wildlife Fund, Whispering Springs. We had Ontario Nature, Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations, Nature London, Wilderness Committee. We had the North Gwillimbury Forest Alliance, the David Suzuki Foundation. We had the city of Brampton, who are opposed to what you're doing.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The government side will come to order.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: All of these people came to spend their time to share with the government their concern for the environment and write in submissions. That's who came to say that they were opposed to what you're doing.

I don't know who supports schedule 6. I don't know who you've been listening to, because not one of those people showed up at committee.

In addition to that—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock.

A reminder to all members of the House that the crosstalk is never helpful, nor appreciated. The side conversations will stop, please, so that I will be able to hear the individual who is speaking, as I was able with the government side. Thank you.

Please continue.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

As I said, there is not one deputant who came to committee to support schedule 6. They're awfully quiet, so I don't know who you're listening to. I don't know who asked for this, but they didn't show up at committee.

If that is not awful enough, this government decided to dump 90-plus pages of amendments, essentially, overnight on this committee. One government amendment that they

put forward took a PC MPP almost 20 minutes to read. At eight pages long, that one amendment was longer than half the bills that this government is putting through the House.

So, really, you made mince of this bill and you had to try and fix it. But you weren't fixing it. In fact, what you were doing was doubling down and making an awful schedule even worse—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock.

I apologize to the member for interrupting. A reminder that all remarks must be directed to and through the Chair, not to the government, please. Thank you.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: And people notice this. People, believe it or not, understand how this government does not respect the spirit of our parliamentary democracy. Putting these amendments in at the last minute and not giving the opposition or the community an opportunity to weigh in is really the way this government behaves.

Environmental Defence and Ontario Nature had this to say about these new amendments: “These new, and never previously discussed, amendments expressly force conservation authorities to issue permits for development, even if it will cause flooding or erosion and jeopardize human health and safety, if the government issues a minister's zoning order.... They also force conservation authorities to accept and implement ‘pay to slay’ agreements with developers to allow natural values to be wiped off the landscape for a fee.”

That's in response to the fact that no one had enough time to weigh in on these 90-plus pages of amendments that the government put forward.

They're not listening to the opposition. They're clearly not listening to their constituents, because they're calling us.

I'm going to take the time to read a bit of a letter that came from the Canadian Environmental Law Association, which lists a summary of all of the people and all of the actions in the province of Ontario that are speaking out against schedule 6.

The Canadian Environmental Law Association had 1,200 unique views on a town hall that they hosted, a webinar.

Over 4,000 supporters of Environmental Defence have emailed and phoned MPPs calling for the removal of schedule 6.

Some 19,000 supporters of Ontario Nature have sent emails calling for the removal of schedule 6; and 13,000 supporters of the David Suzuki Foundation have sent emails.

We have resolutions passed by almost 40 municipal councils in the province, including the cities of London, Sudbury, Thunder Bay and Hamilton.

Ontario's Greenbelt Council—what was at that point Ontario's Greenbelt Council—wrote letters to the minister.

Ontario's Big City Mayors approved a motion to call for the removal.

Of the 45 deputations made at the standing committee, they all objected to this schedule.

The Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations, which represents approximately 60 municipalities, wrote directly to Minister Phillips, appeared before the standing committee, and called for the removal of schedule 6.

AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, wrote to the committee, stating that their preferred option is to withdraw schedule 6.

The town of Ajax, which we'll talk about later, responded to the ministerial zoning order on a protected wetland.

And the Ontario Federation of Agriculture wrote a letter, also objecting to schedule 6.

I'm reading these here because the government seems to not acknowledge or want to respond to them. They haven't mentioned them today. But these are a vast, vast slice of just some of the people who have spoken out against this schedule, and that's a lot of emails that somebody in this Legislature is receiving. People are outraged by this, and rightfully so, and they're not hearing from their government.

These are real Ontarians, and it would appear that this government just wants to brush them off. They're not just special interest groups.

I had an emergency town hall, and I had over 1,000 different people participate. That's a lot of people on a Zoom call on a Wednesday night, when, as I've said before, they could have been binge-watching *The Crown*. Instead, this is what they chose to speak up about. They're not special interest groups. They're average Ontarians who care about their environment, who care about the greenbelt—as do we.

The Premier also received a letter with over 100 environmental agencies, an open letter that they didn't respond to. Clearly, you're not listening to your Greenbelt Council, because of these mass resignations that we'll talk about in a bit. It is stunning that there's this much of a groundswell and the government just chooses not to even address it at all.

1500

Madam Speaker, you will be pleased to hear that I don't intend to waste any more of my breath addressing this government. Tens of thousands of Ontarians have written in. The government is not listening, so I'm going to spend the balance of my time trying to address directly the people of Ontario and let them know that we are listening, that despite the fact that they have a government that is not listening, we will acknowledge what they are fighting for.

We'll acknowledge that this is a government that is wrong-headed in so many ways. Their anti-environmental actions have finally caught up with them, and that is what I'd like to speak about today. In some way, I think what I'll try to do is tell a bit of story as to how this started, how we got here and where we might end up.

I think what I will start with is a quote from Margaret Atwood. As we know, Margaret Atwood is a Canadian treasure. She is a Companion of the Order of Canada. She has won the prestigious Booker Prize twice. We all know Margaret Atwood—perhaps the Premier didn't at one point, but we all know who Margaret Atwood is.

On Twitter she was asked if she could explain the story of what this government is doing with schedule 6.

Margaret Atwood, because she's a genius, summarized what's happening with schedule 6 in a tweet. She said, "Ok nutshell. 1) kill nature & we die. 2) gut enviro protection for cronies and you kill nature 3) so keep yer mitts off it eh? 4) If David Crombie walks, there's a dead skunk in the garage...." That is it in a nutshell, and I couldn't begin to summarize it in the way that Margaret Atwood has. I'm going to expand on this story, and I'm hoping that it doesn't end up being like the dystopian story that Margaret Atwood is famous for in *The Handmaid's Tale*. So let me begin to talk about—what we all know—how we started, how the story began.

As we know, and as the people of Ontario know, as soon as this government took office, they began an assault on our environment and our environmental protections. They made no bones about it. They cancelled cap-and-trade, foregoing billions of dollars in revenue at a time when we needed revenue. They fought this in court. They spent \$30 million defending it. They tore up all kinds of contracts. They ripped out charging stations on the 400-series highways. They tore up contracts.

The Auditor General's most recent report said that this government spent \$233 million cancelling contracts, and we know that they had their stickers that didn't stick that were ruled unconstitutional. I mean that was the first chapter in this government's attack on our environment.

I'm sure—in fact, I've forgotten many because the list was pretty long, but they did fire the independent environmental commissioner. They also fired just for—I don't know what, good measure?—the independent child and youth officer, Irwin Elman. They cut environmental budgets. They cut Indigenous funding in this province, and so that is where the story began: budget cuts to ministries that protect the environment; budget cuts to essential services that the people of Ontario rely on and didn't expect that this government would cut so deeply.

Now we're at schedule 6. As we know, and as we've been hearing, schedule 6 strips away the power of Ontario's 36 conservation authorities, and that is when it comes to the conservation authorities' power and role in protecting the province's most vital natural areas.

Did the MPP from Scarborough Southwest say it was 80 year—the conservation authorities? Yes, 80 years—since the mid-20th century we've had conservation authorities: 80 years of protecting our environment and controlling floods.

The story is important to tell that this began with Hurricane Hazel. It may seem like a long time ago and a distant memory, but the impact of Hurricane Hazel, where people lost their lives and agricultural land was washed away, was a lesson where the province of Ontario said, "We need to change things, and we're never going to let this happen again."

If you even think about the Holland Marsh, which is some of the most fertile agricultural land in the province of Ontario, that was under water, and fertile soil was washed away. So the province and communities all across Ontario rightly decided that we would need to develop an integrated flood plain management program. It is about

flood plain management, but it's also about protecting our land, water and natural habitats in this province.

We understand that. The municipalities that wrote to you understand the role of conservation authorities. All the people of the province of Ontario have seen the good work that conservation authorities do, but it would seem that this government has a grudge against conservation authorities. As I said last year, when they were in budget-slashing mode, they slashed funding for conservation authorities by 50%—and this was at a time when there was unbelievable flooding in the province of Ontario. I don't know if you recall, Madam Speaker, but parts of northern Ontario were under water, cottages were under water. This was the time when this government decided that they were going to slash funding for conservation authorities.

Those shrunken budgets have made it harder for conservation authorities not just to protect flood lands and prevent flooding, but to plant trees, restore forests and prevent further soil erosion and water pollution. I think people need to understand that source water—the contamination of source water—needs to be protected during flooding, and that's the role that conservation authorities play. Essentially, they make Ontario healthier. They make our environment a healthier place and they make it healthier for the people of Ontario. Our river valleys, flood plains, wetlands, Great Lakes, shorelines—as I said, it's water supply. Our headwaters and our source water protection are all going to be vulnerable to the degradation and the gutting of the conservation authorities' role in protecting them.

The government is just not listening. There's no understanding what the government is thinking. There's no clear rationale. We haven't been presented with any witnesses who came forward to say why this was a good idea. In fact, now we have seen that the opposition has risen to the Greenbelt Council. When the Honourable David Crombie calls the government's actions "high-level bombing," people need to take notice. This is a former federal minister, a former mayor of the city of Toronto, a PC politician. He's highly respected across all party lines. When this honourable member calls what the government is doing "high-level bombing," you would think that the government would listen or even acknowledge this, but it hasn't been the case.

Even this morning, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing in his press conference doubled down and continued to blame the council and, in most unbelievable fashion, essentially tried to blame the lack of expansion of the greenbelt on the actual Greenbelt Council. That couldn't be farther from the truth and is just not a credible statement.

If the government is not listening to the people at committee or in their constituencies, I'm going to take some time to read some of the letters that we've received, so that they can be heard in this House. I'm going to start with a letter from someone in my riding in Dundas. It was a letter to the editor, and the title is, Premier Ford "should be ashamed."

“The recent Spectator editorial, ‘Don’t give free rein to Ontario’s developers’ ... needs to be reprinted, full page, in every ... publication in the province.

“The sole purpose of any developer is profit, not the interests of the public or the environment. In this case, developers, with their huge financial resources, have been able to use their behind-the-scenes influence to achieve a purpose contrary to every citizen of the province. It appears they are accomplishing their goal by acting during the fog of COVID ... to achieve their objective.”

That’s from “Hon. Thomas A. Beckett, QC, Dundas.”

1510

We have heard what David Crombie had to say about schedule 6 and its impact—a “high-level bombing.” I can’t believe I’m saying that as often as I can, because it’s mind-boggling. But all of the other members of this council that had the integrity and the backbone to stand up and to resign from this council have written as well. I’m just going to highlight some of those letters.

From Pamela Blais: Among other things, she says, “Changes to policy do not have to result in the destruction of the natural environment, collateral costs or the reduction of Ontarians’ rights to have their voices heard. The government’s actions do not constitute sound, evidence-based public policy nor serve the interest of Ontarians.”

Wayne Caldwell had this to say: “I am also concerned that we are making such fundamental change in the midst of a pandemic. This is a time when people are focused on livelihoods and their own personal health and safety.”

That is so true, Madam Speaker. People shouldn’t have to stand up and fight for fundamental environmental justice when they’re so busy struggling to overcome the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Deborah Martin-Downs had quite a lot to say. She said, “The council has urged your government to withdraw schedule 6 from Bill 229 to allow for proper evaluation and public discourse. You have also disregarded the wishes of AMO, Big City Mayors and dozens of municipal councils by refusing to withdraw schedule 6.”

She goes on to say, “I stand with David Crombie in his condemnation of the inclusion of an explicit requirement for conservation authorities to permit the alteration or destruction of features that are protected under provincial policy, municipal policy and conservation authority regulations in areas designated under a minister’s zoning order.” The MPP from Waterloo will probably enjoy this statement: “No Walmart, warehouse, casino, or housing development is worth the long-term environmental costs.”

Kevin Eby had this to say: “I also find it disturbing that the traditional public consultation and natural justice rights enjoyed by the people of Ontario in planning for growth are being circumvented through a dramatic increase in the use of ministerial zoning orders.” We will get to describing why ministerial zoning orders, combined with schedule 6, are so offensive and so overwhelmingly destructive to good planning in the province of Ontario.

Kevin goes on to say, “That the government is taking these actions in the middle of a pandemic is particularly troubling.”

Kevin brings up an important point, which is the idea of access to natural justice. We know that the Auditor General’s report recently highlighted the fact that this government themselves is in violation of their own Environmental Bill of Rights. They failed to post major projects on the Environmental Registry, and that is the only way the people of the province of Ontario can weigh in. So, yes, absolutely this is disturbing, because it doesn’t include access for public consultation and it clearly shows that the people of the province of Ontario are having their rights denied by this government not following their own rules when it comes to the Environmental Bill of Rights in the province.

There are quite a lot of these, actually. How many resignations did we have? There’s quite a few.

I’ve got one from Kate Manson-Smith, who said, “Conservation authorities are key to the future of watershed planning in Ontario. Their continued long-term success is central to our environmental stewardship responsibility. The steps taken in Bill 229 put decades of excellent work across city and regional boundaries at risk.”

Finally, Lynn Morrow had this to say to Minister Clark: “Recent actions taken by the government with respect to Bill 229 and the proliferation of ministerial zoning orders represent a reckless gutting of land use watershed planning in Ontario. You put at risk the very ecosystems that sustain and protect Ontario’s greenbelt. You shutter public discourse. This is not good for the environment, the community or the economy.”

I mean, that’s a very powerful statement indeed.

Finally, I have this note that was sent to me by Sarah Harmer. Sarah Harmer is a very well-known, respected Canadian musician. She is a platinum and multi-Juno nominee, but, most notably for today’s debate, she co-founded PERL, which is the organization called Protecting Escarpment Rural Land. This is her statement on these actions. She said:

“Thanks, Sandy. Happy to contribute a thought or two.

“Gutting our conservation authorities is the exact opposite of what we need to be doing right now. We have a climate crisis on our hands, and we need solid science and long-term thinking to protect ourselves and our watersheds. Bulldozing flood plains and source water protection areas is idiotic and costly, and we know better. Do better,” Minister “Clark. Do better,” MPP “Gill. Do better,” Premier “Ford. People of Gananoque, Halton region and Etobicoke all know that to protect Ontarians’ homes from flooding and our well water from being contaminated, our government must listen to the experts and represent all of the people, not just self-serving ‘developers’ and transnational aggregate corporations. We will not be able to buy our way out of the environmental calamities that this selfish and short-term thinking will create.”

Again, a very succinct sum up of what the people of Ontario feel about what this government is doing with schedule 6 in this budget bill.

But, you know, we’ve been hearing a lot about ministerial zoning orders, and I would say that not everyone

understands what these are and that they are usually used very infrequently. This government has issued approximately 35 of these since March. So people understand, a ministerial zoning order means that the minister himself, in this case, is able to override recommendations and decisions from municipalities and from conservation authorities, and is able to override things when—and this is in communities where they have an official plan. This is in communities where they have good, science-based land use planning, where they have robust zoning bylaws. The minister can just come in and kneecap all of that, can just come in and wipe away all the good planning that people have done working with conservation authorities, working with scientists, working with experts, and just overrule all of that with the swipe of a pen.

There's no place more egregious, that we know of, than what's happening in the minister's own backyard—Minister Phillips's, the finance minister's, own backyard. There was a ministerial zoning order issued in Ajax to allow a developer to build on Duffins Creek. Duffins Creek, as you will know, Madam Speaker, is a protected wetland in our province. You would think that to use what is often described as the nuclear option, which is the ministerial zoning order—that it would be for something important. You would think that what they would be doing is building long-term-care homes, they would be building affordable housing in the middle of a housing crisis, but, apparently, that's not a priority for this government. What they are building is a warehouse—part of what they're building is a warehouse, on protected wetlands in Minister Phillips's, the finance minister's own riding of Ajax. You can't understand what is going on here—

Interjection.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Exactly. Really, this is the priority?

As the member from London—Fanshawe has reminded me, this is what they're busy working on as opposed to finding a way to fund four hours of hands-on care for our long-term-care seniors, our families. The government's own commission urgently recommended that they fund four hours of hands-on care, but they don't listen. They're not listening to their own commission, they don't listen to the people of Ontario, and, clearly, it's not reflected in a budget that has not put any funding or any human resource plan at all to address what we urgently think it is that we need to be focusing on: our seniors in long-term care at a time when there is a crisis.

1520

In my riding in Ancaster, at Chartwell Willowgrove, there are 16 people who have died so far in an outbreak, and do you know what? They need help now. That's what we should be focusing on, but instead, the minister has busied himself with issuing ministerial zoning orders to build a warehouse on a wetland.

There's also an instance in Stratford where a company called Xinyi Canada is going to be building a glass factory, and that required a ministerial zoning order. The people of Stratford are concerned by this. There's an outcry about that, to the point where we have written to the Integrity Commissioner. MPP Burch has written to the Integrity

Commissioner to investigate as to how this came about, because there's no transparency. There is no planning. There is nothing that would say that this makes any good planning sense—

Mr. Jeff Burch: No vote by the municipality.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: —no vote by the municipality. Where is the transparency? Where is the accountability? Instead we have a ministerial zoning order that just plops this down where people don't want it.

Even in my riding of Hamilton, there's a ministerial zoning order on the Hamilton brow lands that Mohawk College had planned to use to expand, and the minister has just taken that away without consultation, without a vote at city council. They just come and they impose their will on communities and override municipalities, override the people who have elected those councillors to conduct good planning. They just come in and they just stomp on all of that, because for some reason there is a reason they want to do it, and it's not being made clear to the people who have to be subjected to these ministerial zoning orders. It's no way to conduct yourself as a government—absolutely no way. For an accountable, responsible government, this is no way to behave.

But with part of the story that we're telling, I think we really need to look at who is going to be hurt by all of this, because we don't have any answers as to who the government is consulting. I can just say that the questions are out there. These are ministerial zoning orders that seem to come from nowhere, that didn't come from city councils, didn't come from good planning and didn't come from the residents themselves. I'm just going to put it out there that a lot of people talk about the fact that this is giving an upper hand to speculation and to developers in the province of Ontario. It is just a matter of public record, Madam Speaker.

Written in an article in the Toronto Star—I'm going to quote from that; I'm just going to put this out there and the people of Ontario can make the connection, if they think there may be a connection or an answer to why we've seen this proliferation of ministerial zoning orders. It goes on to say: “Developers connected to the Toronto sites fast-tracked by Premier Doug Ford's government for condos made significant contributions to the Ontario PC Party in the last three years, a Star analysis has found....”

“Last month, city officials scrambled after discovering Ford's government had unexpectedly issued three ministerial zoning orders overruling the regular city planning process on sites in the West Don Lands, cutting out community consultation and scrapping promises of benefits to that local neighbourhood.”

We know that the Premier has come under fire before, as it says here, “both for secret cash-for-access fundraising and a close relationship with developers during the 2018 election,” so I would say that I think that the people of Ontario need to understand. Is there any kind of a connection to what is being considered lobbyists or insiders who are having the ear of the Premier? That may be the reason that we're seeing these MZOs. It remains a question—

Mr. Lorne Coe: That's imputing motive. Point of order, please.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock. I recognize the member on a point of order.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you very much, Speaker. I've been listening very carefully to this presentation, and it's straddling back and forth between imputing motive. It has landed on that right now, both with the narrative as well as the reading of the correspondence.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I appreciate the member's point of order. I will say to the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas that no member has the right to impute motive, and you cannot say indirectly what you cannot say directly, so to the member's point and to all members: Anything you read in this House must reflect the standing orders.

So I appreciate the point of order. Please continue.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will just end this section of my debate by saying I will put it out there that this is a matter of public record about the donations. The MZOs are a matter of public record. The people of the province of Ontario can draw any conclusions they want. I won't be doing that because I don't want to impute motive, but the problem is that we have no explanation for why these MZOs are appearing—it's like they're handing them out like candy in the province of Ontario.

We need to really drill down into who is going to be hurt by schedule 6. We heard at the standing committee all of the people who came to say how this is going to impact them and the negative effects that this is going to have in the province.

I'm going to start by saying that if you are a resident in Ontario and you live in rural Ontario, this bill is going to hurt you. The people of rural Ontario understand that. They understand that flooding means groundwater contamination. They understand that flooding means a loss of arable farmland. They understand that flooding means road washouts, it means bridge washouts. They know this. Their organization, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, came to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to say that they are opposed to schedule 6. I'm going to read some sections from the letter from the newly elected president, Peggy Brekveld—congratulations to Peggy. Also, I would just like to say that the vice-president—I think she'll be well-served, because he comes from my riding of Ancaster. So congratulations to Drew as well.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture highlighted the fact that we are losing agricultural land in the province of Ontario. It says here that Ontario's agricultural land declined "from 12.6 million acres in 2011 to 12.3 acres in 2016," so a rate of loss equal to 175 acres a day—175 acres a day of farmland we are losing in the province. Does it need to be said that farms feed all of us? And this is about food security. They came to the standing committee to say, "What you are doing is a negative impact on what farmers and agricultural communities are trying to do." Agricultural lands are finite and they're shrinking, and this government's bill will ensure that that happens.

They basically said that they would like the government to reconsider schedule 6, and they also expressed "deep-seated concerns" with the "recent proliferation of minister's zoning orders (MZOs) issued for municipalities with robust planning systems." They said, "This frequent use undermines Ontario's long-established system of land use planning under the Planning Act."

They were opposed to this because there's good planning. People spend time and energy, and experts weigh in on good planning for agricultural lands. This schedule 6 will short-circuit that. In addition, it deprives citizens impacted by MZOs of the ability to consult.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture is not happy with this bill. They straight up said at committee that this is a threat to farmland and a threat to food production. How much more of a warning do we need in the province to understand how serious this is?

We also had a deputation from the Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations. You will remember, Madam Speaker, last spring, cottage country was under water. People lost property; there was shoreline erosion. It was a real crisis in the province. The Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations represents these areas—many of the areas that are represented by the Conservatives MPPs across the way. The MPP for Barrie–Innisfil would know that her riding was under water, so you would think that she would like to listen to what they have to say.

This letter from the federation of Ontario cottagers' says, "With respect, FOCA believes that meaningful public consultations on these important decisions have yet to happen and are required prior to overhauling the role of CAs. We believe that the use of an omnibus budget bill to make such significant changes to our environmental laws ignores the public's right to comment under the Environmental Bill of Rights", which I've already mentioned, Madam Speaker—that the government is not compliant with their own rules, their own environmental bill of rights.

1530

They've gone on to say, "The repeal of schedule 6 of Bill 229 will allow for the development of a cohesive resource management system, with the CAs as important service delivery agents." The Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations—they're not listening to them.

If you live in cities, we know, your basements have been flooded. We all know that. Your basements have been flooded because of extraordinary rain events or extreme climate events. People can't get insurance coverage for the current damage, and they can't get coverage for future damage. So if your basement is flooded in the province of Ontario, if you live in a city, you can make a direct line to schedule 6 in the budget.

Municipalities all across the province are struggling with their infrastructure costs. The city of Hamilton has something like a \$2-billion infrastructure deficit. What that means is roads and bridges that need repair—and flooding damages, all of that. And what happens then? Where does that money come from? It comes from property taxpayers. It has downloaded the cost to the

municipalities, and then what we have is that individuals' property tax needs to go up to try to address the cost that could have been prevented in the first place if this government wasn't so short-sighted and was not putting an attack on our conservation authorities in a budget bill.

In the city of Hamilton, we also have a lot of struggles with our aging infrastructure. The city of Hamilton, among all other municipalities across the province and cities, has asked this government directly to scrap this legislation. I'm going to read a little bit from some of the comments that municipal councillors in the city of Hamilton and our mayor had to say about this: "Hamilton city councillors are urging the province to scrap legislative changes they say will gut conservation authorities of their ability to protect the environment from development...."

"Councillor John-Paul Danko called the province's motivations 'really mystifying' but still offered his best guess.

"In my opinion, what we're seeing from this provincial government is just actions that are putting profits by the development industry ahead of the people and property of Ontario residents."

Mayor Eisenberger said, "The province's attempt to expedite development is 'filled with error and filled with hazard' for flood plains and water courses. 'And it just makes absolutely no sense.'"

Finally, Councillor Brad Clark, who was a minister in Harris's Conservative government, had this to say: "If the province doesn't change course and acknowledge its 'misstep' ... it's destined to become a 'political albatross that you will not be able to shake.'" And I imagine that he understands about that.

On Wednesday, our city council of Hamilton gave unanimous support to a "motion calling on the province ... to withdraw conservation authority changes" in Bill 229, schedule 6.

In Hamilton, our conservation authority has done some remarkable work, working with environmental groups like Environment Hamilton. Hamilton is an escarpment, and essentially, there are two tiers to the city: There's the escarpment, and then there's the lower half of the city.

Interjection.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Exactly. The escarpment has karsts and has very sensitive and interesting geological lands. But one of the problems is that the runoff from the top of the city impacts flooding in the lower half of the city. There was a point when we had a once-in-a-hundred-years storm, which we're seeing almost every year now, where the lower city of Hamilton, the lower Stoney Creek, was almost under water.

Working with the conservation authority, groups like Environment Hamilton have created some innovative solutions, some good, green infrastructure like at Saltfleet marsh. What they're building is a naturalized marsh that will essentially retain water runoff so that it doesn't flow over the escarpment and so that it doesn't flow into people's basements and so that it doesn't cause the kind of damage that people have been seeing. That is the point of all this, that these costs fall downhill. I mean, the

government barely funds at all the costs of conservation authorities. They don't cover the costs for municipalities when they have infrastructure deficits, so they can wash their hands of it, but the people who live in cities, who live in rural agriculture, who live in cottage country know who pays the price: They pay the price through tax increases. They pay the price through damaged property.

In Hamilton, everyone will know, we had a very tragic instance where Cootes Paradise was flooded with billions and billions of litres of raw sewage. It's a bit of a complicated story, but the fundamental piece of that is that we have aging infrastructure in Hamilton, as we do in all municipalities across the province. And so the government doesn't help invest in improving our infrastructure, and the government then cuts the conservation authority that actually helps to mitigate against that, so it's a double punch for municipalities and for taxpayers. What you have are flooded basements, you have road erosion, you have bridges that are washed out.

We know that this government is not going to step up and help, because we've seen that they basically, through this budget, have told the people of the province of Ontario, "You're on your own. We're not putting the kind of investment in to keep you safe and to keep long-term-care homes operating, or to keep hospitals safe. You're on your own during COVID, and you'll also be on your own when your communities flood." That's not what people expect a government to do. They expect them not to pass the buck; they expect them to understand that this is all integrated and that each of these pieces of the puzzle needs to be in place to protect people.

Madam Speaker, it's completely stunning to me that the PC MPPs across the way have not spoken up on this, because we can only imagine that they've heard from their constituents. I have heard that they're not getting their emails answered or calls returned, and that it's very difficult to get through even to the ministry, and that there's one central number and all of the direct lines are no longer accessible. Why don't they want to hear? I honestly have to ask you: Why is it that this government doesn't want to hear or respond to the people's concerns?

Again, I just have to say that there must be a reason, and perhaps we have interests that are more powerful than individual residents in the province of Ontario, but there is a disconnect here. There is a loud outcry from the people of Ontario on what this schedule 6 will do to degrade the environment and, ultimately, to allow the greenbelt to be bulldozed. There's an outcry, and then we get silence, complete silence, from the government.

I'm just talking about who is going to be hurt, not just what. We've talked about the environment. We've talked about water contamination. We've talked about agricultural land, cottages. We've talked about the infrastructure and who that's going to hurt. But do you know what we need to talk about, Madam Speaker, more than anything? How this is going to impact future generations. There are so many young people who have lost jobs during COVID-19, and there are so many people who have had hope for a recovery from COVID-19 that would include good, green

infrastructure; a recovery that would take into account the environment, not just development and job growth at the expense of our environment.

This is what young people of the province of Ontario are interested in. They had an opportunity to participate in an economic rebound that was something that they could feel proud of or something that they value, and instead of looking at that and providing a vision, providing hope for the young people of Ontario, this government is essentially pulling the rug out from under them and saying, “Do you know what? We don’t care what the environment is going to look like when you inherit it. All we care about is a bottom line in this year or perhaps next year.” It really is just a shame, and it’s a complete betrayal of the young people in the province of Ontario.

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We could take a lot of lessons from our Indigenous communities—generations of Indigenous communities in this province that understand the importance of protecting our environment and how we’re all interconnected.

I did have a town hall, when we were face to face. I was honoured to have Chief Arvol Looking Horse come to Hamilton to talk about his experience at Standing Rock. I’m just going to read a little bit of what he had to say, because I think it will provide us some wisdom that we need in this House. Arvol Looking Horse is the 19th-generation keeper of the sacred white buffalo calf pipe for the Great Sioux Nation, and he’s a leading voice in the preservation of sacred sites across the planet. He had this to say: “We as caretakers of Turtle Island have always understood Great Spirit has blessed us with the water of life.... We always knew it is the lifeline to maintain health and well-being.” Some of these comments come from World Water Day, which is an international celebration. He went on to say, “Those that know how strong spiritual energy is, understand water is the most essential lifeline to survival. It is a ‘source of life’.... It is time we wake up the world to stop abusing and destroying a gift of life—before it is too late.” A spiritual leader had that to say, and I think there are lessons in that.

People have been pleading with this government about what you’re doing to the conservation authorities. The essence of what people are trying to say is that they need you to understand that people want to protect the environment. They want to conserve what we have now for future generations. It is not ours to squander as we see fit. Rather, we are supposed to be stewards of the environment. We’re supposed to protect it so that it is there to hand off to future generations.

I think it’s important to understand that Indigenous nations talk about seven generations. That’s the kind of thinking that we need in this place. We need to understand that what we do now shouldn’t be for us and it shouldn’t be for the bottom line next year. It shouldn’t be about the Minister of Finance being able to show good numbers on the deficit next year. It should be about generations—as long as seven generations after us. That is something that could make us feel good about what we do here. If we made decisions that we knew would impact grandchildren

and great-great-grandchildren that we couldn’t even imagine, then we would have a sense of purpose and we would have a moral compass if we talked like this and if we understood that that is how we should be understanding the environment. I’m sorry to say, though, that we have not seen this in this House.

We have heard heartbreaking stories about Neskantaga—and I want to say that, again, our MPP from Kiiwetinoong bears on his shoulders every day the weight of the horrible tragedy that’s unfolding in many of the communities that he represents. But nothing is more shocking than Neskantaga. They’ve been under a boil-water advisory for 25 years. That’s the longest such advisory in Canada. Again, the government is not listening.

Let me take the time to say some of the words of young people who are not talking about the future—they’re talking about right now, that they don’t have access to clean water. Twelve-year-old Lyndon Sakanee and nine-year-old Bee Moonias have called for action on the water crisis so they can finally go home—because they’ve been evacuated to Thunder Bay. They are nine and 12, Madam Speaker. Lyndon said, “We’re not animals or things. We are human, like you guys.” And Bee had this to say: “Sometimes, I feel like we don’t exist.... Like, we’re just ghosts and we’re just put in a drawer, in a box. We’re suffering in that box. With no clean water.”

I’m sorry, Madam Speaker, that I’m so emotional. You would think that we have the power in this House to make change. We have the power in this House to put forward good bills, good schedules that make our world better, not to make it worse. This government can talk about development, and this government can talk about the economy. But do you know what we want to talk about? We want to talk about Bee. We want to talk about a young girl who we have failed.

This government’s record on Indigenous affairs: Not only have they cut budgets, but they’ve cut the Indigenous curriculum-writing, for heaven’s sake. Also, the Auditor General’s most recent report said, among other things, that the province has not reported on progress in health, employment, education for Indigenous people in the province, despite the Truth and Reconciliation commitment to do so, dating back to 2015. What more do we need? What more does my colleague have to do to help you understand that your job here is to make life better for vulnerable people, young people?

What we see is the Premier moving quickly to give developers and speculators an upper hand. There’s no doubt about it; these changes in schedule 6 will make development on protected lands, on our natural green lands, easier. It shouldn’t be easier. There should be an ability for all of us to have a conversation about this. We need to balance. The environment is important; so is economic development, but it shouldn’t be at the expense of our environment.

I started by saying that I was going to tell a tale, trying to do Margaret Atwood some justice. She did it in three, four lines; I’ve done it in 57 minutes here. What I want to say is that this tale doesn’t have to have a sad ending.

Ontario's tag line used to be, "Yours to Discover"—and what that meant was our wonderful natural environments, like our Great Lakes, Georgian Bay, cottage country, our rivers, our escarpment, all the things that we not only discovered but that we're so proud of.

Now we've changed the licence plate to, "A Place to Grow." I want to say that I'm hoping the government doesn't think that "places to grow" means just growing the bottom line of certain for-profit corporations. What we're talking about when we're talking about "places to grow"—people to grow their families, to grow in communities that are healthy and that are supportive and that balance the interests of individuals against the need for development.

I'm telling the government that you can change this ending. I have said at committee and I pleaded with this government to withdraw schedule 6. Take the time to get it right. The fact that you had 90-plus pages of amendments shows you didn't get it right in the first place. There are all kinds of experts, there are all kinds of concerned people who will share with you their wisdom and their wishes for their communities. They're not special interest groups, and this is not noise. These are the heartfelt concerns of the people of the province of Ontario.

People are watching. You have to understand how many people are watching this. I think perhaps you're so surprised by this because you put forward a budget bill and you thought that's what people would talk about and no one would notice what you tried to slip by the people of the province of Ontario. But people saw it, and people are upset.

I'd like to say to my colleagues across the way: You are the government. You have a majority. You don't need to rush things through the House. You don't need to rush things through committee. Everything that you have will get passed. We're supposed to, as the Speaker reminds us, use power wisely and well. Here's your opportunity to do this.

I urge you to stand up for what is right. You know this is right. You know that withdrawing schedule 6 is the right thing to do.

I also, in the most heartfelt way, want to say to you that this is not where you want to squander your reputation—because voting on this bill will, unfortunately, mar you for the time that we get to spend in this place. This place is an important place, and we should feel the responsibility and the dignity that the people of the province of Ontario have given us to stand here and represent them.

I urge you to withdraw schedule 6 and listen to the province of Ontario.

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and comments?

Ms. Donna Skelly: For the past hour, we have listened to the member opposite talk about one thing, and that is a particular section in this proposed bill that has nothing to do with the economy. She is the finance critic and never once mentioned anything to do with the economy, which is why, perhaps, so many of her constituents in the business community reach out to me to ask for guidance and

help—because they're getting none of that from representatives across the aisle.

The core mandate of conservation authorities is to undertake watershed-based programs to protect people and property from flooding and other natural hazards and to conserve natural resources.

I met with members of the Hamilton Conservation Authority recently. They shared with me that they spend about \$2 million on watershed planning and engineering, of their \$15-million budget. Does the member opposite think that is addressing the core mandate of conservation authorities in Ontario?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It continues to be unfortunate that the MPP for Flamborough–Glanbrook feels that the people of Ontario are special interest groups and what they bring to this government is just noise.

We would discuss this budget bill if there was something in it that gave real relief to small businesses in the province of Ontario.

In some way, the member has it a bit backwards, because I am receiving all kinds of calls from her constituents, who say that this bill does nothing to support them; that they have done everything they can to keep their doors open; that they wanted rent relief and didn't get it in time; that they don't want more deferrals of taxes; that they don't want to have a government that is saying, "If you make it through the end of the year, we'll offer you a tax break." They need more than \$1,000 of PPE. That's what the small businesses are saying. And that should be in this budget bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's unfortunate that the government does not recognize the connection between the economy and the environment. Permitting the destruction of large wetlands is fiscally irresponsible. Once lost, the flood control, nutrient removal and other services wetlands currently provide for free become costly, if not impossible, to replace. For example, Toronto's Ashbridge's Bay marsh was filled to create the Port Lands, but in 2017, the government announced an allocation of \$1.25 billion for the Port Lands flood protection and Don River mouth naturalization project. When politicians and parties allow developers to destroy wetlands, taxpayers foot the bill.

Does the member think that the government has fully comprehended how damaging schedule 6 is to the economy and to the environment?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I don't know who wrote the member's question for her, but it absolutely does not make any sense. What I'm saying is—

Interjection.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Pardon me, Madam Speaker, do I need to sit down? Okay.

What I have been saying for an hour is that if the government did understand the connection between environmental and the economy, they wouldn't have schedule 6 in the bill in the first place. It makes absolutely no sense.

I have had constituents from the member's riding who asked why this government does not seem to understand

that they care about the environment. They called this government's Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan "hot garbage."

So people understand this government is failing on the economy, which is failing the environment as well.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions? The member from Whitby.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker. I know, because we share Durham College and it has the skills development centre, that you would have been pleased with the \$180 million in the Ontario budget that was devoted to employment services and training programs to connect workers in the industries most affected by COVID-19 with industries facing a skills shortage. The skills mismatch has been evident in this province for a number of years, but this government is addressing it.

Would the member opposite be supporting that \$180-million investment in the Ontario budget?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Absolutely, to the member opposite. We support any investment that will help people get back to work, that will help young people, especially, find good jobs and support themselves.

But what we cannot support is you using a budget as a cover for an attack on our environment, which in the end will actually be destructive to the economy.

Young people, particularly, know what you're up to, and while they need support, they're not going to do it at the expense of the environment.

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

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank the member for her debate.

I want to tell you about 13-year-old Sophia Mathur from Sudbury. She has been doing climate strikes for two years in Sudbury. She's the first person in North America—the first person outside of Europe, in fact—to do this. Her mantra has been the same since day one: It has been to listen to the experts.

The member from Hamilton-Ancaster talked about unanimous support for a municipal petition. We had unanimous support in Sudbury—which I can't hold up because it would be a prop—brought forward by Councillor Joscelyne Landry-Altman and Councillor Mike Jakubo, and unanimously voted forward. The member listed the number of people who supported this, the experts who say that this is a bad idea.

My question to the member is, why won't the government listen to the experts the way that a 13-year-old girl recognizes is important?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It's a good question, and I'm going to say, it beats me. That is what the people of the province of Ontario say. "Why doesn't the government listen?" No one understands this. There's something that's missing from this that we haven't been privy to. Who asked for this schedule, and who is it going to benefit? Those are unanswered questions. People are not listening to the people of Ontario, particularly the young people. That is the thing about this bill that is most disappointing—that it shows a complete disregard for the future of young people in Ontario and for the things they value the most.

Thank you for your question. If I knew why the government doesn't listen, I probably could bottle that and sell it to all of us, because there are a lot of unanswered questions here.

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

Mr. Michael Parsa: I want to ask the honourable member across—and I asked my question to the parliamentary assistant earlier. Much of this budget provides support for the hardest-hit small businesses in our community—support towards payroll tax, property tax and other incentives for local municipalities to be able to give breaks to small businesses; support for the cost of PPE. There is all kinds of support being provided for small businesses. How do you not support these measures that are in this budget?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: This is an age-old thing that the government will do. They bury something that's completely objectionable to us and objectionable to the people of Ontario, so it makes it very difficult to support a budget bill that is more about attacking the environment than it is about providing supports for small businesses in the province.

This budget is not going to help small businesses. Five convenience stores a week are closing now, and what the government has got in this budget are deferrals and, "Wait and see. Maybe later, we'll get around to you." That's not going to help people right now. Combine that with confusing COVID-19 restrictions that in fact allow companies like Walmart and Amazon, big box stores, to operate, but puts at a disadvantage small businesses, and this budget is a failure for small businesses in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We have time for one quick back and forth.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I want to say to my colleague, who said they don't know why they put schedule 6 here, that I know why they did. It's very simple. Take a look at what's not in here. When one of our colleagues asked her the question, "Why can't you support this?"—there is nothing in this budget for hiring more PSWs, when we had close to 3,000 seniors dying in long-term-care facilities, and no money for capping class sizes. In schedule 6, almost—I have to sit down? Okay. You were standing up. You caught me in the middle of a sentence there.

Every single Niagara region councillor, every single elected representative, is saying, "Get rid of schedule 6." And do you know what? A lot of them are Conservatives.

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Ms. Sandy Shaw: Absolutely. You've got an answer. Everyone in the province of Ontario knows the answer. We're just not allowed to say it here. But they know why schedule 6 is in here.

They also wanted to know why, as my colleague has said, you didn't put money in there for long-term care—

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: I am pleased to stand in the House today to speak to budget 2020, Ontario's action plan to protect, support and recover from the impacts of

COVID-19. This is our government's next phase of a comprehensive action plan to respond to the serious health and economic challenges of this pandemic.

Ontario's action plan sets out a total of \$45 billion in support over three years to ensure the necessary health resources are available to continue to protect Ontario, delivering critical programs and tax measures to support individuals, families and job creators impacted by the COVID-19 virus, and laying the groundwork for a strong long-term economic recovery for Ontario.

Let me turn now to the first pillar of the plan, which is "protect." Our government is determined to do whatever it takes to protect the health and safety of people under these unprecedented and extraordinary circumstances. Throughout, our government has delivered the resources necessary to help hospitals and public health units stop the spread of this virus. We are supporting front-line health care workers and protecting vulnerable populations, including seniors and residents of long-term care.

Ontario's COVID-19 response to the health sector is now a projected \$15.2 billion. Our government is making \$4 billion available in 2021-22 and a further \$2 billion in 2022-23 to ensure the province remains responsive to evolving needs in the fight against this pandemic. The 2020-21 spending includes \$2.8 billion to support the province's fall preparedness plan for health, long-term care and education.

Our plan is the most comprehensive and robust plan in the country in response to the second wave of COVID-19. We are maintaining vigorous public health measures, including a \$1.4-billion investment to continue expanding testing and case and contact management while supporting COVID-19 testing at pharmacies and within communities. The plan also includes additional funding to support hospital beds, address the surgical backlog and purchase additional influenza vaccines.

Our government is also investing an additional \$572 million in Ontario's hospitals to support the extra costs attributed to the coronavirus. This brings the total funding to hospitals above and beyond what was provided last year, to over \$2.5 billion.

We are accelerating efforts to reduce surgical backlogs, while ensuring hospitals have the capacity to manage COVID-19 and the flu season, by investing nearly \$284 million to address the backlog and enable over 60,000 surgeries. Our government is managing backlog and wait times by providing additional funding to add 17,000 new MRI operating hours. We are adding 180 neuroservice procedures, 3,400 cardiac procedures and over 6,000 procedures related to hip and knee replacements, cataracts, stroke, cancer and renal care.

We have prepared for surges in COVID-19 cases by alleviating pressure on hospitals and the broader health care system through expanded access to home and community care services, by expanding community paramedicine programs and ensuring hospitals have bed and staff capacity, by adding up to 766 beds, with an investment of more than \$116 million. This means Ontario has invested \$351 million to create more than 2,200 hospital beds to give the system additional capacity.

We are recruiting, retaining and supporting more than 3,700 front-line health care workers and caregivers with an investment of more than \$52 million to ensure our health care system can meet any surge in demand.

The province is investing more than \$18 billion in capital grants over 10 years to build new and expanded hospital infrastructure and to address urgent upgrades, including repairs and maintenance, to help modernize hospitals right across Ontario.

Our government is going to extraordinary lengths to protect and provide proper care for Ontario's growing seniors' population during this COVID-19 crisis.

Significant investments are being made in long-term care to address the long-standing challenges in the sector—to provide modern facilities, more staff, increased care and additional beds. To protect loved ones and address years of neglect by the previous government, Ontario is providing over half a billion dollars to complete required renovations and measures to improve infection prevention and control, to purchase more PPE and to build a strong health care workforce.

While Ontario's Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission is completing its review, our government is acting immediately to protect Ontario's most vulnerable population. Our government plans to increase the average daily direct care of long-term-care residents by a nurse or a personal support worker to four hours a day. This additional care will be phased in over the next four years, and it will make Ontario the leader in hands-on care among Canadian provinces.

Madam Speaker, this is an ambitious plan. It will require significant change in the long-term-care sector, which includes recruiting and training tens of thousands of new staff. We are advancing a long-term-care staffing strategy to confront long-term challenges faced by chronically overworked staff, and this includes accelerating and expanding qualification pathways to increase the supply of qualified health professionals.

In the midst of the second wave, the health risks of COVID-19 remain critical. Our government is making available every resource necessary to keep people safe, and that includes our long-term-care staff and loved ones in long-term and congregate care settings, and our health care heroes who have been on the front lines protecting us since this pandemic began. We are standing behind front-line personnel and direct support workers by providing \$461 million in temporary wage increases for over 147,000 workers who deliver publicly funded personal support services. These front-line health care warriors will continue to be there for us through the second wave and beyond.

Now I'd like to speak about what is being offered to Ontarians in terms of support. There is absolutely no doubt that COVID-19 has made day-to-day life more challenging for individuals, for families and for employers. As part of Ontario's action plan, our government is now delivering an estimated \$13.5 billion in total support for individuals and job creators. This additional relief will provide families, seniors, businesses and workers with

assistance through the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and into the future.

The coronavirus has disrupted the educational path for students and their parents. Parents are balancing multiple responsibilities, while students are adjusting to new ways of learning. Our government is providing \$380 million to parents through another round of payments through the Support for Learners initiative. This funding will help offset some of the additional costs of COVID-19, such as the cost of technology for online learning and educational supplies. Parents will once again receive \$200 per child under the age of 12 and \$250 for children and youth with special needs who are 21 years of age or under. This means that a family with three young children, one of whom has special needs, would receive \$1,300.

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Our government is taking significant steps to protect seniors and to allow them to stay in their homes longer by making their homes safer and more accessible. We are proposing a new Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit for the 2021 taxation year. This would offer seniors a 25% credit of up to \$10,000 on eligible renovations. Seniors would be eligible regardless of their incomes and whether they owe income tax for the year 2021. Family members who have a senior living with them could also qualify for the tax credit.

Madam Speaker, we are continuing the Ontario Community Support Program by investing \$16 million over two years to assist people with disabilities, older adults and others with underlying medical conditions. The program provides people who are self-isolating with meals, medicines and other essentials while they stay at home. Since April 2020, more than 230,000 meals and essential supplies have been delivered to vulnerable individuals.

We are investing an additional \$60 million over three years, starting in 2020-21, in the Black youth action plan, doubling its base funding to extend the current program, and creating a new economic empowerment stream that will support Black youth in achieving social and economic success.

Our government is investing \$100 million over two years for the Community Building Fund. This initiative will support community tourism, culture and sport organizations that have endured significant financial pressures because of the pandemic.

Ontario's arts institutions have faced incredible challenges as a result of COVID-19. Our government has responded by providing one-time emergency funding of \$25 million to help them cover operating losses.

Madam Speaker, this government remains committed to assisting Ontario's job creators through this unprecedented and difficult time.

To support businesses, we are providing \$600 million in relief to support eligible businesses required to close or significantly restrict services due to enhanced public health measures. These supports will help cover fixed costs such as property taxes and energy bills.

Our government is also providing an additional \$1.8 billion in the Support for People and Jobs Fund over the

next few years to remain responsive to emerging needs and to continue offering supports for the people of Ontario.

Ontario has been impacted by the global recession caused by the coronavirus. We all know people who have lost their jobs, entrepreneurs who have been forced to shutter their business for lack of customers, or families struggling to make ends meet. Our government understands the financial difficulties that people are facing, but we are providing new support to those who have been hit the hardest. That includes parents, seniors and small business owners. We are building on what has already been provided—we're building on that strategy.

At this point, I'd like to speak about our government's plan to recover from this pandemic. COVID-19 will impact Ontario and the rest of the world for the foreseeable future. However, our government's 2020 budget begins to establish the base on which a strong economic recovery will be built. We plan to invest \$4.8 billion in initiatives that will support jobs now, while removing barriers that would impede Ontario from moving forward towards a strong recovery.

Among the measures proposed by our government are a reduction in job-killing electricity rates, reducing taxes on employment, connecting unserved and underserved communities with an historic investment in broadband infrastructure, and providing unemployed, underemployed and laid-off workers with skills training, especially in sectors where job opportunities are plentiful.

Tourism and hospitality workers have been devastated by this pandemic. Additional training would help them link up to jobs needing high-demand skills. That's why we are connecting tourism and hospitality sector workers and others most affected by this pandemic to training and jobs with an investment of more than \$180 million over three years. This plan to boost the tourism and hospitality sector includes a skilled trades strategy, an additional \$100 million of dedicated investments through Employment Ontario for skills training, a redesigned Second Career program and nearly \$60 million to acquire skills that are in demand.

We have heard from people, mostly in rural areas of this province, who say their businesses and careers are suffering because they don't have reliable access to the Internet. We are making additional investments of over \$680 million in broadband infrastructure over the next four years. Combined with prior commitments, this increases Ontario's investment to nearly \$1 billion. We understand the critical need and want to ensure that communities across the province are connected.

Madam Speaker, our government is also acting immediately to reduce taxes on job creators. We are levelling the playing field by lowering high provincial business property tax rates to a rate of 0.88% for over 200,000 properties, or 94% of all business properties in the province of Ontario. This measure would create \$450 million in annual savings in 2021, representing a 30% reduction for many employers.

Our government is going a step further by making additional support available to employers who are impacted the most by COVID-19. Some municipalities have

told our government that they would like additional tools to provide more targeted tax relief to job creators in their communities. We are responding by proposing to provide municipalities with the ability to reduce property tax for small businesses. The province will consider matching those reductions. This initiative would give small businesses as much as \$385 million in combined municipal and provincial property tax relief by 2022-23, contingent upon municipal adoption.

The government is also ending a tax on jobs for an additional 30,000 employers. We are proposing to make the employer health tax exemption increase from \$490,000 to \$1 million permanent. This initiative would save private sector employers \$360 million in 2021-22. The savings could be reinvested in jobs and economic growth. About 90% of employers would pay no employer health tax with this additional relief.

It's clear that employers who are looking at Ontario as a place to do business are scared off by the province's high commercial and industrial electricity prices. The sky-high cost of electric power is a barrier to investment in this province, but our 2020 budget outlines a plan to reduce the burden of Ontario's high-cost contracts on employers. These contracts with non-hydro renewable energy producers will be wound down permanently. Starting on January 1, 2021, a share of the cost of these contracts, which were entered into under the previous government, will be funded by the province and not hydro ratepayers. This electricity cost relief would free up money that could be better spent on creating jobs. The ratepayer relief would mean medium-sized and larger industrial and commercial employers would save about 14% and 16%, respectively, on average, on their hydro bills, starting in the new year. As a result of this change, industrial and commercial hydro users in Ontario will go from paying some of the least competitive electricity prices to prices that are more competitive than the average price in the United States.

Again, we know how hard the tourism sector has been hit, but we are committing to provide Ontario residents with support of up to 20% for eligible Ontario tourism expenses. We want to encourage people to get out on the road and discover more of what this incredible province has to offer.

1620

Madam Speaker, while COVID-19 will impact Ontario and the rest of the world for the foreseeable future, our government in budget 2020 has offered a comprehensive action plan to respond to the serious health and economic impacts of COVID-19 and to build a foundation for a strong economic recovery fuelled by growth.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and comments?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I want to thank the member opposite, but unfortunately, we did not hear anything—I'm not surprised—regarding schedule 6 in her 15- or 20-minute speech. I just want to remind the member that the Hamilton Conservation Authority, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, which I'm sure she knows about, and Conservation Halton have all sent letters to the provincial

government calling on them to scrap the plans. These changes, Madam Speaker, will significantly compromise and, in some cases, completely change the role of conservation authorities to protect Ontario's environment and ensure people and property are safe from natural hazards. This is also a concern in my area, in my riding, in Brampton.

So my question to the member opposite is, is there any other legislation in Canada that expressly forces an individual, corporation or other entity to act in a manner that—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you.

Response: the member for Flamborough–Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Madam Speaker, I feel very strongly about the legislation that we brought forward. As I mentioned earlier, I've met with members of the Hamilton Conservation Authority and the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, and we've talked about some of their challenges and some of the problems and concerns that we hear from stakeholders, mostly farmers.

I have a very interesting riding. It's a mix of suburban and rural. I hear from members of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, local farmers who are so frustrated that they go to expand their business, to build a barn and they simply can't get a permit for that. We're simply asking conservation authorities to look at their core mandate and to focus on their core mandate, which is the protection and conservation of the watershed, and I think that this legislation addresses that.

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

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to my colleague the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook for that wonderful presentation.

Madam Speaker, as our government understands, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a significant toll on small businesses. See how they talk about the property tax relief. I know the city of Markham's small businesses have suffered from this property tax. When you say property tax for business, it's a commercial and industrial tax. What does that mean? That is a major-ticket item for small businesses that is through the overhead, part of their overhead expenses.

So, my colleague, could you please elaborate on that relief, which is a wonderful relief for small businesses, and all the good, positive news stories for the small business owners in my riding?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Our government has recognized the challenges that small businesses across our province have been struggling with through this pandemic, and immediately began to put in place a plan that would help them address some of those challenges. I want to share with members of the Legislature some of the measures in budget 2020 that will help businesses small, medium and large who are struggling through the COVID-19 pandemic.

We've offered over \$680 million over the next four years for something that I think is very important. Again,

I want to mention that it's not just in rural areas and northern Ontario areas, but some areas closer to the urban centres, and that is broadband. We have added \$680 million to our budget to address the expansion of broadband, to allow small businesses and members of the agricultural sector to grow their business and to strengthen their business, both during the pandemic and beyond.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: I want to talk about what this budget doesn't take care of. It doesn't do anything for long-term care. You know, 2,300 of our seniors have died in long-term care. Why is this government not doing more to protect our loved ones in long-term care? And I'll give you some suggestions that could be in the budget, like hiring more PSWs, taking profit out of care. No one should make a profit as seniors in long-term-care facilities get less care and, quite frankly, as we've seen with COVID-19, die.

So I'm going to ask a question today to the member: Will you commit to ensuring four hours of hands-on care in our long-term-care homes immediately?

Ms. Donna Skelly: As the member opposite knows, we are a government that cares about members in our long-term-care community. That is one of the reasons why we have committed to four hours of care in long-term-care facilities. It is something that previous governments simply ignored. We are in this situation for one reason, and that is that the previous government for the past 18 years did nothing. It wasn't a sexy issue, so they ignored it. They spent no time or money addressing the challenges facing long-term-care homes across Ontario, and it was silence from members opposite in opposition. We recognize the challenges facing long-term-care facilities, and we are the first government to commit to four hours a day of care in LTC homes.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member for Scarborough—Guildwood—question.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question to the member from Flamborough—Glanbrook: Madam Speaker, the—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order. Stop the clock. I'm reminding the member to not use props in the Legislature.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I can't read from a paper?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): It would appear there was something on the back.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay. I'm sorry to interrupt the member. Please continue.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: There's lots of sensitivity here, Madam Speaker.

The executive director of Environmental Defence, Tim Gray, notes that, this past weekend, David Crombie, former PC MP, and six members of the Greenbelt Council resigned. He says that he thinks that they resigned "on principle," that they're "involved in a body that is supposed to be giving advice" on the environment, for

protection of our watershed areas, "and the provincial government is not taking that advice."

So my question to the member is, why wouldn't you listen to the science and listen to that advice and withdraw schedule 6?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for the question, to the member opposite.

I want to share once again what the core mandate of conservation authorities in Ontario is. If I may share it with the member opposite: The core mandate is "to undertake watershed-based programs to protect people and property from flooding, and other natural hazards, and to conserve natural resources."

As I mentioned earlier, I have met with the conservation authorities in my region. I was really surprised when I looked at how much money that was actually being directed towards wetlands and watershed mitigation. In a budget of almost \$16 million, to have \$2 million, to me, is not a priority. We are asking conservation authorities to protect and to go back to their core mandate and to address these concerns.

In fact, just this morning, Minister Clark announced \$30 million to help conservation organizations create and restore wetlands and priorities across Ontario.

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

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I certainly thank the member. It's truly a comprehensive proposal put forward in this legislation. But the one that really grabs my attention, of course, is simply the reality that we're dealing with with COVID now, with just communications. Connectivity is literally the elephant in the room, as we've seen, whether trying to do a Zoom meeting, whether trying to do Telehealth. We have so many parts of our community—I know I have 20% of my riding where there's no connectivity whatsoever. Emergency services are not available. Reaching across this province the way we are—this is not a wish list; this is a must do. I thank the member for demonstrating the commitment to this, and certainly, I'd like her to tell us a little bit more about it.

1630

Ms. Donna Skelly: This is an incredibly important initiative. Something I'm very proud our government has finally recognized is that it really is an area that has been neglected but is critical for not only businesses across Ontario, not only for members of our agricultural sector, but as you mentioned, members of our health care sector.

Over the next four years this government, in this budget, has committed over \$680 million for broadband infrastructure which, combined with its prior commitments, increases Ontario's investment to an unprecedented billion dollars—unprecedented, Madam Speaker. I hear continually from members within my riding about the need for better connectivity and I think, as displayed in our budget, this is proof that our government also recognizes the challenges, but more importantly is doing something about it.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to join in the debate on Bill 229 today, third reading of this debate, after a very, I would say, eventful clause-by-clause and amendments that happened on Friday, given what the government brought to the table at the last minute. It's been very interesting to listen to the debate this afternoon, because sometimes you can sort of discern how a government is feeling about a piece of legislation by what they don't talk about.

Certainly, schedule 6 is problematic for every member on the government side. Coming from Waterloo region, I want to tell you, Madam Speaker, I got my start in politics with friends of the Waterloo moraine, as a grassroots environmental individual, and then of course took the lead on some initiatives at the local school board—Waterloo region—with outdoor education and with an environmental committee at that place, because I listened to the people of Waterloo region and they were very clear that negotiating and decimating environmental reforms is not up for debate.

In fact, what we should be doing—there should be actually a genuine sense of urgency on the part of the government—is to actually put greater protections in play and also to recognize that there is definitely a connection between the economy, the values and the prosperity of Ontarians, and how we deal with the environment. So I'm going to thank my community sincerely right now. Thousands upon thousands of emails came into my office, so I'm sure that they came into the other members' offices.

I'm going to start right now with the vice-chair of the Grand River Environmental Network. His name is Kevin Thomason. They watched with horror what happened on Friday with these massive amendments that came in, which further degraded the protection of environmental leadership in the province of Ontario, which is long-standing—and I'm going to go into that.

I just want to say, the Grand River Environmental Network is a collaboration of dozens of groups and environmental experts on the Grand River watershed, and they're very concerned about schedule 6. They want schedule 6 to come out. They want it pulled. They don't think it should be part of Bill 229. We agree with them, which is why we will not be supporting this budget, and that is a non-negotiable position for us, Madam Speaker.

He goes on to say:

“—the government failing to recognize the importance of watershed-based planning”—we agree with him;

“—the essential role the conservation authorities play in environmental stewardship and climate change preparedness”—they are ignoring this;

“—the lack of public consultation and total disregard for public input/process on this bill and so many others recently ... ” is a non-starter for them;

“—the dramatic increase in the use of MZO's, creating an autocratic dictatorship rather than a democracy with diverse input.”

These are very strong words, Madam Speaker. People feel that this government is going in exactly the wrong direction: “The government continually ignoring the

people, public process, due course and the best long-term interests of the province to instead pander to a small, select group of developers and special interests seeking profits at any cost”—that is how citizens see schedule 6.

“Talking with others and following up the absurd minister announcement this morning about the insulting \$30 million in funding for conservation being used as a red herring while they gut our environment, there is increased concerns about the increased use of”—this is in quotations—“‘pay-to-slay’ by this government. Specifically”—so this was new for me, this language, “‘pay-to-slay,’” but it's actually very common. It comes primarily from lessons learned from the United States. The backstory, I guess, on this is that around the wetland money announcement is that new schedule 6 revisions that came in on Friday also allow pay-to-slay, where developers pay a fee and then they destroy a provincially sensitive wetland. Then, these fees go to groups where they can build new wetlands where it's more convenient. “Only in Ontario,” you say. But no, actually; in the States, this is actually a practice. The system has been used in the US and it has been largely a failure.

Everyone including the OHBA, DU, the OPG etc. agree that provincially sensitive wetlands should never be open to offsets and that offsets should be a last resort for addressing loss of area around fragmented wetlands after all the options around avoidance have been proven impossible.

This is what citizens have told us through this group. They say that the government continues to reduce public process and increase backroom deals that turn decisions that used to be made by experts, by panels, by authorities into decisions by politicians and ministers, often with little technical knowledge or subject-matter expertise. And this is in quotations: “Frankly, the government is quite simply ignoring its people and is a government for land speculators.” That's pretty strong language given the fact that the groups really are catching up to this schedule 6. It was alarming to see it in an omnibus piece of legislation which is supposed to set the moral compass, if you will, around funding priorities for the government, and it's buried in there. It is non-negotiable for us.

I just want to say, in particular, the Grand River Conservation Authority, which has a long-standing reputation in this province for its leadership and has actually been recognized internationally—this is an interesting piece, and I know the member for Kitchener–Conestoga is really going to enjoy this part. Greg Michalenko, who is a former professor at the University of Waterloo, goes into the history of how the accolades for the Grand River Conservation Authority have come forward from other jurisdictions around the world. They, in fact, won the Thiess International Riverprize back in 1999, which acknowledged their leadership on flood protection, on land planning, on source water protection. At the time, the Ontario Premier, Mike Harris, sent them a congratulatory letter and this is what it said: “The GRCA was the first watershed and river management organization in Canada, and the third oldest in the world. This award reflects the

respect and admiration of your industry. The contribution you have made to the community is an inspiration to other organizations and individuals and to all of Ontario.”

Let’s remember that “the Ontario conservation authorities have developed and flourished for 74 years, under 11 different Premiers from three political parties. The initiating government was that of George Drew, whose Progressive Conservative Party has been in power for about 47 years of the” Grand River Conservation Authority’s existence. Mr. Michalenko says, the Ford government “is a disappointing and embarrassing exception. Bill 229 threatens to dismantle much of the powers of the conservation authorities. The results could be disastrous for our watersheds and Ontario’s wonderful reputation in river basin management will be damaged.”

Please remember that the Grand River Conservation Authority is protecting water for almost a million citizens across southwestern Ontario. If you actually reflect back on our history as a conservation authority, the citizens have rallied to protect this authority because they understand the connection between source water protection, progressive land use, flood prevention, and they understand that that helps their community as a whole be stronger.

And there is a cost. There is a cost to irresponsible planning, and this was pointed out by Rebecca C. Rooney, Andrea Kirkwood and Nandita Basu. They wrote an op-ed in the Toronto Star, “GTA’s Workhorse Wetlands Are Under Threat.” I made this point earlier—it didn’t go very far, but I’m going to make it again. They make the point that this is fiscally irresponsible to undermine the conservation authorities.

I think that we have to be very cognizant that actions contained in this budget omnibus piece of legislation will have a negative impact on our ability to protect those communities, but also that there is a cost to undo the damage.

1640

We on this side, under the leadership of our environmental and climate change critic, have already started to put our minds to how we are going to undo what this government is doing. That’s how serious it is.

Rebecca makes that point that “permitting the destruction of large coastal wetlands is fiscally irresponsible. Once lost, the flood control, nutrient removal, and other services wetlands currently provide for free become costly, if not impossible, to replace. For example, Toronto’s Ashbridges Bay marsh was filled to create the Port Lands ... with negative impacts on flooding, erosion and water quality. In 2017, the government announced an allocation of \$1.25 billion for the Port Lands flood protection and naturalization projects. When politicians allow developers to destroy wetlands, taxpayers foot the bill.” They will pay on many levels.

“Let us not lose decades of policy advances aimed at protecting wetlands to political special interests aimed at lining the pockets of a few.”

I think it was very powerful—I mean, the fact that conservation authorities rallied in such a short amount of

time and that this was incredibly newsworthy over the weekend. The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority put out a very long, detailed, research-based statement saying, “If you are not worried, you’re not paying attention.”

People are worried because people are paying attention, and yet we heard the finance minister and the parliamentary assistant earlier today just avoid talking about schedule 6 altogether. And for some of us, this might have been a bit of a hopeful moment in thinking that perhaps schedule 6 was going to get pulled. However, they have not indicated that to this point.

Also, southern Ontario has already lost more than 70% of its wetlands. So this is a fight worth having. This is a battle worth winning. And certainly, the government side, if we connect the economic value to conservation authorities, if we clearly outline how this will have long-standing, negative impacts on the health and well-being of the people of this province and the economy, how could the government, in good conscience, move forward in this direction? Who are they working for is the question that is coming into our offices, and for good reason.

The Waterloo Region Record also put out an excellent editorial because they’re hearing about it. They point out, on several fronts, that “Since the mid-20th century, the Grand River Conservation Authority has been responsible for protecting and restoring the land, water and natural habitats of the Grand watershed. All that in addition to controlling floods that can still prove devastating.”

So if you’re wondering why people are so worried about this, it’s because—and I’ll just quote directly from the editorial: “But the Ford government wants Ontario to be open for business, regardless of what happens to its open spaces.” That is the perception out there. When the electorate is using your own slogans against you, you should start paying attention, I would think. “In legislation slipped into their omnibus budget bill, the PCs are taking steps to remove or significantly limit what conservation authorities can do to control development in their watersheds.”

They go on to say, “The government would also withdraw the ability of conservation authorities to issue stop-work orders, a power that had been previously granted but not yet enacted in law. Conservation authorities were looking forward to using this tool to halt detrimental or illegal activities in natural hazard areas, such as flood plains.

“In addition, the province would allow only municipal councillors to sit on conservation authority boards instead of including other members of a watershed community. That single change could cause the most damage to the ... conservation authorities because the duty of future board members would be to their individual municipalities, not the conservation authorities. As a result, the interests of a patchwork of municipal governments would take precedence over the interests of the watershed as a whole.”

The water doesn’t stay in one municipality. All the municipalities are connected by the watershed. What you’re actually doing—and this is a little bit ironic—is that

you are going to be creating more red tape between the municipalities, and it's going to take more energy and slow down progressive development on a go-forward basis. Is this lost on this government? To date, as of 4:45, it is, Madam Speaker.

This editorial from the Waterloo Record goes on to say, "This province can't afford endless development either from a tax or environmental perspective. We're having a hard enough time managing the sprawl created in the last half century.

"The people living in the Grand River valley who agree with this sentiment should let" this government "know. The river that flows through our history will, one way or another, carry us to our future."

We've been listening to these voices. We've been listening to the experts, who actually have a huge amount of experience. Did the government consult with anyone on this? Of course they didn't. They did a massive amount of consultation on the finances. They didn't listen to what they heard there, but they can still say it was historic. But on this, you didn't listen to anybody. You didn't put out the feelers. You didn't ask the conservation authorities for feedback. The Grand River Conservation Authority in Waterloo had to have an emergency meeting just to figure out how they were going to navigate through this massive overhaul of their mandate. It adds insult to injury as well, because when we have asked questions, members on that side have undermined conservation authorities. They have actually maligned the work of conservation authorities to serve their own purposes.

This is not a departure from what has happened in the past, especially given what we just went through with Bill 213 and Charles McVety, but it is disappointing nonetheless, especially given the Auditor General's report, which demonstrated how we have not met our targets. When the Ministry of the Environment is not even referencing the Environmental Bill of Rights anymore, it's like the environment is not on the back burner; it's not even in the kitchen. We have a huge amount of work to do.

This made-in-Ontario plan on climate change that this government shops around: It is failing. It is failing on almost every level. The province of Ontario needs more than a litter day clean-up to actually address the urgency of climate change.

I just want to get a few more voices on the record. Michael Frind, who is a hydrogeologist at the University of Waterloo, says, "Conservation authorities are unique because they are the only entities that look at land use planning on watershed-wide basis."

They're the only ones that are looking at the connectivity between the watersheds, between the municipalities and land use planning. "This is crucial for flood protection as well as drinking-water source protection."

He goes on to say: "Unfortunately, this Fordian approach will completely ignore the watershed-wide impacts" and it "appears to be motivated purely by short-term private profit."

That is how people see schedule 6. Why is it in this budget when it's a fiscally irresponsible measure that you are taking, and environmentally irresponsible?

Ralph Smith, professor at university of Waterloo, weighs in.

Laura Beecraft weighs in as well: "In the face of climate change and growing populations, the roles served by conservation authorities are more important today, and going forward, than when they were created."

The urgency around climate change is real. People understand it; why is this government not acting on it, Madam Speaker? Even my reverend from Knox Waterloo Presbyterian weighed in. I'm hearing from my minister on legislation. They are so concerned by this.

I do think that Mr. Crombie's resignation letter was incredibly powerful. When he says that this is a "high-level bombing" of environmental leadership in the province of Ontario, I would think there would be some Conservatives who would actually listen to this.

On my file of economic development and jobs, I just want to say how problematic schedule 5 is as well, the Commercial Tenancies Act. The province is bringing back their narrow ban on commercial evictions. Why did it take the government so long to put this bill forward and protect businesses? Remember that at the end of October, a ban on commercial evictions ended for those businesses that were eligible for CECRA. It didn't matter if the landlord applied to the program or not. The qualifications for being covered under the ban are essentially identical to previous iterations of the evictions ban. You need to be eligible for CECRA. Of course, it doesn't really matter, though, because the measures that the government has brought in will not be applicable to many businesses because we have already lost over 14,000 businesses that have closed in the province of Ontario.

1650

You have waited so long to bring forward any sort of a direct financial support. You have made it as difficult as you possibly can for small businesses on main street to survive. The Premier himself has stood in this House and said that the CEO of Walmart has said that he has to keep the store open for non-essential items and essential items, which, of course, impacts small businesses on main street.

Last week, we had a ridiculous debate in this House around the cap on delivery fees not being eligible for franchises and only being eligible for those businesses that are in lockdown. There are restaurants and small businesses across this great province who are doing everything to survive, and this government shows up and gives them less than half a measure, half an ounce of hope on that.

So Madam Speaker, we will not be supporting this budget because of schedule 6, but also, it fails on so many levels.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and comments?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member from Waterloo for having your say today.

My question really revolves around seniors. I think we owe a great amount of gratitude to seniors in this province for having built this province, having fought in wars. Our government is proposing a tax credit of up to \$2,500 for a \$10,000 investment in renovating homes to allow seniors

to be able to stay longer in their house, which I would think most members of the House agree with. That ensures seniors can stay with their families, and they can stay in a safe environment. We're accelerating the development of long-term-care homes. We're hiring more PSWs, increased wages, and putting a higher standard of care for long-term care.

So my question is: What are your thoughts on supporting seniors as a component to this bill?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Honestly, the four-hour minimum level of care is not budgeted in this document. I met with RNAO on Friday. The government has not responded to their accelerating a personal support worker program at Conestoga. There's no money to accelerate the training and upscaling of PSWs.

We just saw the Auditor General's report today. You know what seniors want? They want more than one bath a week. They want fresh fruit to be incorporated into their nutrition. I don't know what you're waiting for. What are you waiting for to actually put the money behind the words that you're saying in this House? Please read the budget, because it's not there.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question? The member from Waterloo. No—the member from Niagara Falls. Sorry.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Don't fight over me. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm going to stand up here again and say that you're not talking about long-term care, our parents and our grandparents that have died: 2,300, and in the second wave the number goes up. Schools: We're not capping school sizes and having money go there. Our PSWs: When you stand up and say you're hiring more staff, it's not correct. You're going to hire in 2024-25. You know what? People are dying today; 30 people died last night. What are you guys doing?

My colleague talked on schedule 6. Why do you think that all these organizations that are on this piece of paper—which I'm not supposed to do—are not supporting schedule 6?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Response? The actual member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you for that. The reason that people have tried to reach out to the government is that they can't get in those rooms. They are not being listened to. We now know who this government actually listens to in the province of Ontario, and it isn't the special interest group called the citizens, I tell you that much.

On the seniors' piece, at my meeting with RNAO on Friday, one of the registered nurses works at a long-term-care home in Waterloo, and she waited for eight PSWs to show up on Friday night, the week before. All of them called in sick. She has 142 patients to care for—one person. She told me that no one made good decisions that day because there was no support for her to do that. This is the missing part of the long-term-care strategy, the home care and the long-term care staffing piece, and yet there are solutions coming in from organizations like the

Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. I don't understand why you're not listening to them.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: For the House's indulgence, I was actually in touch with an organization on Friday that was given quite a bit of money that is doing training in conjunction with PSWs at Conestoga College. So there is a lot of money flowing for that.

But what I'd like to ask the member for Waterloo, my esteemed riding neighbour, is if she is not supporting this budget, she's also not supporting a billion-dollar investment on broadband, which I know for our community in Waterloo region is an extremely important investment. It's something that people have been talking about for years. We have got, I think it's almost 12, RFPs that have just come to fruition. Work will be starting on that soon. I'm just curious to know why she wouldn't support that.

Ms. Catherine Fife: This is the way it works: You put some good parts in an omnibus piece of legislation, small measures that we could support, but then you put in a schedule like schedule 6, which is completely unworkable. It's a poison pill. It doesn't need to be in this piece of legislation.

All of us in this House should be focused on the pandemic and supporting small businesses, not big box stores—which the Premier is solidly in their corner. We need a PPE strategy for businesses that are outside of the two to nine employees. The cap on delivery fees that you brought forward last week only for businesses in lockdown and not franchise owners only goes halfway, and the hydro support that you love to talk about—hydro is built into a lot of commercial rent, so you're actually only helping the landlords. Help the small businesses and then we could work together.

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

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Waterloo. I want to remind everyone the bill is Bill 229, Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act. Our critic for economic growth and job creation reminded everybody that over 14,000 businesses closed. Two weeks ago, I talked about 12 businesses within two blocks that closed right here in Toronto. Every day, there is a new business that is shuttered while the government sits on their hands.

I'm wondering, to the member, why would the Conservative government, in a budget that's about recovering from COVID, slip in schedule 6, which really has nothing to do with helping small businesses survive and everything to do with rewarding their developer friends?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you to the member from Sudbury. You make a good point. This budget should be solely focused on seeing us through this time of crisis from an economic perspective, from a health care perspective, because health care and the economy are intertwined.

I thought the member from Sudbury might also ask about opioid overdoses, because you're passionate about

that. Is there something in this bill that prevents the need—less deaths that are happening in all of our communities—all of our communities, Madam Speaker? Does it address it? Of course it doesn't.

What it does do is it has built a few measures around small businesses which make it harder for them to apply. They have to jump through all of these hoops and then they find, at the end of the process, that they don't qualify for the assistance. There's no good reason why businesses in the province of Ontario should understand and fully comprehend how this government is trying to help them—because they don't right now.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I'm sure the member from Waterloo would really like to spend her time talking about the billions of dollars in COVID reserves and how the government should be spending that to help people who are in need.

Instead, you opened your debate today by talking about pay-to-slay, a US-style way of handling development. Can you talk to us about that? It seems like it's a disappointing moment that we have here in this province, when we're talking about pay-to-slay, which is actually embedded in the amendment that the government snuck in at the eleventh hour the night before clause-by-clause. Tell us more about pay-to-slay, please.

Interjections.

1700

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock. I will invite everyone to please listen respectfully, to allow the debate to unfold. It will be rotational, so all members will have their opportunity to get on the record if they would so choose—I'm speaking directly to the Minister of Education.

I return to the member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The amendment that came forward doubled down on the "pay-to-slay" direction that the government is going in, and basically what it does is it quantifies destruction of the environment. It puts a dollar sign on destroying the environment and then makes the case to put that money someplace where the environment is more convenient for a developer. That's essentially what happened on Friday.

This is what experts are saying. It says, "It cuts out the heart of integrated watershed planning and management; severely cripples the conservation authorities in the pursuit of their historic stewardship of environmental issues, and now with the grossly expanded use of ... (MZO) and other procedural revisions, essential public discussion and debate will be stifled or shut down."

That's the state of affairs in the province of Ontario under this Ford government. It has been mishandled on so many levels and we will all pay the price, including the taxpayers, the taxpayers that this government says that they value.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): There isn't time for another back-and-forth.

Further debate?

Mr. David Piccini: It's great to rise today to speak to this important budget bill. As a member on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, I appreciate all the work that has gone into this budget bill. I appreciate the fact that Finance Minister Rod Phillips and Parliamentary Assistant Stan Cho have worked incredibly hard—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I apologize to the member for the interruption, but I absolutely will remind the member that we address all folks in this House by their riding name or their title. Please continue.

Mr. David Piccini: My apologies, Madam Speaker.

Those two honourable members did incredible work travelling the province of Ontario and worked with dedicated civil servants in the Ministry of Finance on what is a very strong budget for the members of Northumberland–Peterborough South and the constituents that I represent.

Madam Speaker, I can't underestimate the importance of reaching out and proactively getting in touch with Ontarians, the people we serve on a day-to-day basis. When COVID-19 hit, I, like many members of this House—our phones lit up. We had people coming into our office. I was backlogged. We were working way into the wee hours of the morning. So to get out actively and to see those two members consulting with folks in our community—I think we had over 150 people on the Zoom town hall that the member from Willowdale participated in, tangibly connecting residents and business owners with supports available and taking ideas that would feed into this budget.

This budget is in response to what we've witnessed over the last number of months: Ontarians coming together. I think fondly to my riding, to the Brighton Legion, where they had an illustrative display thanking our front-line heroes. I think of Sharpe's Food delivering food for seniors. I think to Councillor Mark Bateman, who I work closely with in Brighton, who proactively went up to Codrington rural roads, delivering food. I think to our front-line heroes working around the clock, our volunteer firefighters—men and women—our first responders, our police officers, our paramedics who were working tirelessly, who gave up of their time to support rural test clinics, like the ones established in Trent Hills.

The strength and resolve of the Ontario people is unbreakable. They deserve a government working around the clock, collaboratively, with all levels of government, to stand by them and to support them. That's what this budget bill is. Now is the time to begin building foundation for strong economic recovery in this great province.

Budget 2020 has three pillars: protect, support and recover. It's \$45 billion in supports over the next three years. So what does that mean? It's important for the folks in Northumberland–Peterborough South to understand what that means—not just the rhetoric that they see on TV or the headlines or the 150-characters-or-less tweets, but what does this mean for them?

It means structural changes. It means the last number of announcements they've seen me make in our community

for long-term care, structural changes to long-term care, bricks and mortar. It means new beds, like at Hope Street Terrace. It means new beds at Pleasant Meadow Manor. When I was at Pleasant Meadow Manner and I spoke to the front-line workers, I spoke to the PSWs. In fact, Madam Speaker, I was honoured to have the opportunity to stand shoulder to shoulder with the resident advocate, and they really appreciated—after the decade of darkness under the previous government, after total neglect to long-term care, propped up by the opposition, Madam Speaker—they appreciate a government that made investments into long-term care, into bricks and mortar, into new facilities that are going to support the residents in living their life.

We don't talk often about the nuance, but I was reminded of a conversation I had with Melinda at Hope Street Terrace and the announcement I'll soon be making there of new beds, of the importance of how our PSWs and nurses move about in the facility—a brand new facility—and how they are going to move with ease, supporting the seniors and our loved ones that are there.

I think of the 611 net new beds. I was appalled. Madam Speaker, yourself and other members who were at finance committee and heard the depositions—it's appalling, I think we all agree, the 611 net new beds built under the previous government. Hindsight is always 20/20, but it's so rich, after a decade-plus, to hear comments—as my mom used to say, comments from the peanut gallery—after a decade in which we only built 611 net new beds. This government has launched a seniors' strategy. This government has launched a staffing strategy. We've worked, in February, to respond to Justice Gillese's recommendations. We're shifting from ward rooms to private and semi-private rooms, giving our elderly the dignity of living in a new facility, working around the clock. We have a minister that's not going to stand there and just blame the previous government. There's plenty of subject matter to do there after the decade of darkness—

Interjections.

Mr. David Piccini: And she's heckling me, Madam Speaker, because deep down, when she lays her head on her pillow at night, she knows it's shameful, their record of neglect to seniors in this province.

We now have a doctor at the helm, someone who devoted their life to family practice, who devoted their life to supporting seniors in this province.

Madam Speaker, the staffing strategy I spoke to, increasing the average daily direct care—and I would like to also thank members opposite. The member—her riding escapes me—who has challenged our government, who said, “Look, let's ensure we have a minimum-hours standard of care. Let's ensure that the long-term-care employees that I'm meeting with on a day-to-day basis have the supports that they need—

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Catherine Fife): Point of order?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: The member, rather than focusing on his debate, is imputing motive about what I think about

when I lay my head on my pillow. I think it's highly inappropriate in this House and it brings down the level of debate.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Catherine Fife): I will remind the member to please stay focused on the debate that we're having today and not make very personal comments about other members. Thank you.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm glad that the member opposite has suddenly discovered what imputing motive is after hours on finance committee doing the exact same thing. But I admit, I should do better, so I apologize, Madam Speaker.

On staffing changes, and I think to the four hours of care, minimum, per day that will make us a leader among the Canadian provinces, a leader in this federation; the campaign launched to hire more personal support care workers and more nurses. I think to the work we're doing in the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to allow our colleges to grant degrees for nurses, and I think to conversations I've had with nurses at Loyalist College. Those nurses, up until now, had to form a partnership where they'd be working with our universities, which would mean, functionally, we would lose them in their final two years of care—the men and women who would leave our rural communities who now will have the ability to stay in those communities. Why? In addition, because we've supported them with Ontario health teams; we've got a planning table that's not led by bureaucrats in Toronto, but that's led by experts, by health care professionals in our community.

To that effect, I'm proud that the three distinct regions I represent—Clarington, Peterborough South and Northumberland—all were selected for Ontario health teams. I think of the planning table that I've had the opportunity to sit down with and the work that's being done there, the important work to provide better patient-centred care, where it's needed most.

And we don't just look in isolation at the new beds being built, but we look at the transitional bed funding, taking alternate-level-of-care patients out of the emergency room and into the most appropriate setting of care. So not only are they getting new facility through transitional bed funding and the most appropriate level of care and care setting, but it's helping reduce that utilization rate at Northumberland Hills Hospital, one of the highest utilization rates in the Central East LHIN. We're taking those seniors who are best cared for in another setting and we're creating—we're helping end the backlog. When we talk about hallway health care, that's what it means. So for the folks at home watching in Northumberland-Peterborough South, that's what it means to end hallway health care. It's not just when you need it most in the ER. If you're at home, it's about supporting community paramedicine, again, after being ignored by the previous government.

1710

My predecessor called rural Ontario, northern Ontario “no man's land.” Just appalling. Not surprising that—asleep at the wheel when it came to supporting community paramedicine. Our government has invested in community

paramedicine that's supporting our front-line first responders.

On that note, I'd like to thank our first responders and I'd like to thank Northumberland Paramedics for the great work that they're doing. I had the opportunity to go out and join Northumberland Paramedics on a ride-along, and I saw first hand the important work that they're doing, the important work getting upstream, supporting seniors in place, that community paramedicine that's going to allow our health care professionals to get at our loved ones, to get at Ontarians in a rural setting before they end up in an emergency room costing our system more, costing their lives more, costing the family, creating a far greater toll.

On that, I'd like to also salute the men and women of our police services. I've joined the MHEART. We have mental health supports. We're supporting our men and women in uniform. Seeing the collaborative work being done, I think to visionary leaders like Chief Paul VandeGraaf at Cobourg and the work that they're doing with a tiered policing system: seeing our police officers working with our nurses, getting in the homes of the most vulnerable, people who have suffered for years with opioid and addiction issues, and seeing them get the support that they need; working, going tangibly on one of the ride-alongs and seeing them support people who now, thanks to this government's increased investment in affordable housing, have a roof over their head, thanks to our investments in MHEART, have a health care professional supporting them, not when they're getting arrested on the streets by these police officers, but working collaboratively in their homes, giving them the supports that they need.

Madam Speaker, I can't imagine to start contemplating what's driven someone into a life of addiction out of no fault of their own, but what I can do as an elected member is stand with the members on this side of the House to get them the supports that they need in the best community-based setting in rural Ontario. I'm proud that our government stood and made those investments.

This brings me to our hospitals. I had the opportunity and distinct honour to stand alongside Premier Ford, alongside our Premier, alongside our Minister of Health to make a substantial investment into base funding at Northumberland Hills Hospital and Campbellford hospital. Now, I have the distinct honour to represent, of course, Lakeridge Health Peterborough, but I'm going to focus on the two smaller hospitals that I represent distinctly in the riding boundaries that exist, the bricks-and-mortars that are in the riding I represent, that being NHH and CMH.

In 2017-18, NHH received \$41 million in base funding. They were on that trajectory, \$41 million, \$42 million, then our government got elected. Today, in 2020-21, they have \$52 million in base funding. That's a historic increase, the likes of which we've never seen. Again, sadly, they weren't listened to by the previous government, but we've taken an interest.

I don't have all the answers, but whether it's on Christmas day with Linda Davis, the CEO, going around, having those conversations in the quiet of a Christmas morning, talking to the front-line workers, saying, "Dave, the in-patient unit that's been merged into one because of

Liberal cuts, the in-patient unit that's causing stress and anxiety on nurses who are walking around the hospital after their shifts just to decompress"—they now have in-patient units A and B, two in-patient units to support, thanks to our government's increase in base funding.

Or I think to Campbellford Memorial Hospital, a hospital that was teetering. When I knocked on doors in Campbellford, people said, "David, please, don't close our hospital. Please don't do that." Well, our government got elected, and fiscal prudence—imagine that, a government that took an interest in prudent fiscal management, invested in Campbellford Memorial Hospital so that they could work with KPMG and others to make the right investments where they're needed most, so that we could listen to the front-line workers to make investments into Campbellford Memorial Hospital.

I'm pleased to say that we're now working with them on a rural health hub model. They stood tall for the assessment centres in Trent Hills when COVID affected us last March. Madam Speaker, you juxtapose that with the constituents in tears over fear for the future of that hospital under the previous government—we're on a far better path today. I don't stand here, to the residents of Trent Hills, to say the job is done. We've got a lot more work to do, but we are on the right path. We're making the right investments into Trent Hills.

I'm proud that the base funding increase has meant predictability. It's meant stability. Madam Speaker, it has meant better patient-centred care. Which leads me to item number 2, support: The \$13.5 billion, or \$2.4 billion in new funding—again, what does that mean for the folks at home watching in Northumberland—Peterborough South? Well, they're watching on their computer or on their TV. That means good Internet; that means broadband.

I'm proud for the families that we're helping that quietly called me and said, "You know, Dave, in the rhetoric we're seeing in labour negotiations with our education sector, can you support us, get the technology and the skill set that our students need?" We have a minister, Madam Speaker, who listened to families in rural Ontario, who took time to come out and not only launch new EarlyON centres in our riding, but sit with youth in our community who said, "We want to be equipped with the technology, the technical skills to succeed, to start our new business." God forbid, imagine that, starting a business online.

I think when I was doing my co-op at uOttawa, witnessing at La Bottega, where I used to slice deli meats, witnessing Shopify help that business go online. I think today of ordering gifts for some of my staff and others through that online system. I think to the bright minds, the Canadians, who did that. Under the previous government, they wouldn't have had those skill sets. Under the bold leadership of this minister, who hasn't capitulated to paid activists but who has listened to parents and said, "No, we're going to make those technology investments," who has been met by a Minister of Infrastructure who said, "We're going to make investments in broadband."

I stood with our First Nations Indigenous leaders Chief Carr, Chief Mowat. I facilitated a round table with our

Indigenous leaders in the riding I represent, with our mayors, and we jointly wrote to the federal government and said, “When will we see national leadership on the broadband file?” In Ontario, we’re not waiting for anyone, Madam Speaker. We’re making just under a billion-dollar investment in this budget to support rural Ontarians.

I’m going to talk about equity and diversity and supports. Equity and diversity and supporting everybody means supporting rural Ontarians, means supporting the forgotten parents on Second Line and Third Line Roads who get up every day, drive a truck, drive an hour to drop their kids off at school and drive an hour to hockey practice. That means supporting them, Madam Speaker.

I make no apologies, and I’m really proud, to represent rural Ontario. I’m really proud to stand up for those rural Ontarians, and so proud that we’re equipping those families with the technology supports for their young people so that they can get the technology supports that they need—students with disabilities, up to \$250—matching it with broadband. A government, boldly, again after a decade of unconnectivity—not a surprise. There was nothing going on there, Madam Speaker. It was the dial tone that you would get. We’re moving from that old dial tone, and we’re moving boldly into the 21st century, where we equip our next generation with the technical skills they need to start up new businesses, where we equip our businesses with the digital supports they need to once again become the engine of the Canadian economy.

I think, to EORN supports as well, the cell gap—I mean I could go on for days here, Madam Speaker, and I only have two minutes left. But the seniors’ home tax credit: We’re supporting them with 25% of eligible renovations. When I talk about aging in place, again, I would encourage everybody, let’s not look at health care through the silos of one file, but let’s look to the holistic approach that this government has taken to invest in aging in place. I spoke not only to our builders and manufacturers the other day, our skilled trades in ...

I think, to EORN supports as well, the cell gap—I mean I could go on for days here, Madam Speaker, and I only have two minutes left. But the seniors’ home tax credit: We’re supporting them with 25% of eligible renovations. When I talk about aging in place, again, I would encourage everybody, let’s not look at health care through the silos of one file, but let’s look to the holistic approach that this government has taken to invest in aging in place. I spoke not only to our builders and manufacturers the other day, our skilled trades in Northumberland–Peterborough South—who are excited to get to work building ramps, these assistive devices supporting our seniors aging in place. My riding has one of my oldest demographics, the oldest populations in Ontario, I think only beaten by Haliburton and Kawartha, and of course that’s because they have Kawartha Dairy up there. But I think of those supports that we’re providing those seniors to age in place. It’s needed. It’s so needed.

1720

Our Community Building Fund, our tourism, arts and culture sector—I’m proud that we’re standing behind the Capitol Theatre, and I’m proud to have made a call to them

to deliver the good news just last week. We’re standing by Westben. We’re standing by our young artists, standing and supporting them. It wasn’t lost on me as the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and all of these groups presented at 25%, 30% massive pay cuts, and here I grapple with very real and tough conversations we’re having with our civil service, asking them to please understand the 1% increase over the next three years. And then I think to people in the arts sector who have lost a quarter of their pay.

We’re working with them. Minister MacLeod, our minister of tourism, culture and sport, joined me in my community and is investing in our RTO8 and the important work they’re doing, standing by our tourism sector; our Community Building Fund, connecting workers in the skilled trades; launching a 20% tax credit for the year of the staycation, which hopefully all members of the Legislature will support in the year to come.

Madam Speaker, 20 minutes has flown by, and I’d just like to say that this government understands that we’ve got a lot of work to do. We’re human, and we’ll admit our faults as well, but we’re driven and motivated by the unbreakable community spirit to improve life for Ontarians—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I recognize that we are all human, but the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South hasn’t talked about schedule 6. The changes proposed in schedule 6 will reduce or constrain the mandate of conservation authorities and are, therefore, contradictory to the interests of the people of Ontario, who are facing enormous risks and costs as a result of climate change and ongoing biodiversity loss. The roles and responsibilities of conservation authorities are critical in protecting the lands, waters and wildlife, which benefit businesses and communities across Ontario, and upon which our health and our well-being ultimately depend. What is your view of removing schedule 6 in its entirety from Bill 229?

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

Mr. David Piccini: I support that schedule, and I support the forgotten folks in rural Ontario who packed the Keeler Centre; 315 people came to the consultations that we had at the Keeler Centre in Colborne; farmers who said, “We don’t have a voice.” We think back to the reason conservation authorities exist in the first place, which was to acknowledge the work that our farmers and our ag sector are doing. Madam Speaker, I think to rural Ontarians trying to sever land. I think to municipalities handcuffed by the cyclical cycle of scope creep with our conservation authorities.

I’m glad the member opposite asked that question, because in my riding, 11%, 14%—that’s what’s being spent on flood mitigation by the GRCA and Lower Trent, where I think it was 16%.

We’ve got to get back to our core mandates. Of course, we support our conservation authorities. That’s why we’re asking them to mandate—their core mandate. We’re going

to support rural Ontarians. We're going to support modernizing—God forbid, a government does that to a government agency—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you.

Further questions?

Ms. Donna Skelly: I was pleased to hear the member talk about how our government is bringing other ministries kicking and screaming into the digital age. We have a Minister of Education who had the foresight to recognize the virtual learning when the opposition did everything in their power to prevent young people from learning online. Lo and behold, we are struck with this epidemic and that's what those children have to do.

Would the member please talk about what our government is doing to bring other ministries into the digital age and how we are working to expand broadband so all Ontarians can be connected?

Mr. David Piccini: I'm glad the member opposite heckled you and said nobody wants to be in this pandemic. She's right: No one does, but there's a stark contrast here between a laggard government that would have never had the foresight to invest in technology, to invest in supports that would equip our students to learn in the 21st century—but we had that leadership, and I'm glad we have. I'm glad for the rural Ontarians on 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th Line Roads. I'm glad that they've got a government that is going to work with the ICON strategy, work with our not-for-profits, our Indigenous partners, our municipalities, to equip them to get connected, not only so that they can study, but so that they can grow their business.

I know that on the opposite side they don't want to see businesses growing in this province, but we're going to equip our next generation to grow their businesses, and we're going to empower them with the technical skill sets and the connectivity with broadband to do that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A reminder to all members to please direct your questions to and through the Chair, including responses.

Further questions?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is for the member for Northumberland–Peterborough South. In his presentation, he said that his government is working collaboratively with all levels of government, and that that's necessary for Ontario to advance, and yet, 40 councils, including London, Thunder Bay, the region of Peel, South Frontenac, the city of Toronto independently, Big City Mayors and many others have called for the removal of schedule 6 from this bill. I note that the Ontario Federation of Agriculture was very unhappy with the further amendments that were brought forward this past Friday.

When you ignore municipalities and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario when you have this piece of legislation brought forward, how can you say you're being collaborative?

Mr. David Piccini: I'm very pleased to rise to answer the member's question. You know, Madam Speaker, working collaboratively does mean working with all levels

of government, which is what this government has done. It doesn't also mean we're going to agree every step of the way. It means showing real leadership here, and it means standing up for the 315 folks who packed the Keeler Centre, the disproportionate majority of which wanted a government to look at one of the arm's-length agencies here, to look at reform for conservation authorities, to look at authorities whom taxpayers of Ontario fund to make sure they're focused on their mandate, which is source water protection, which is flood mitigation, and focus their mandate on doing that.

That's what we're doing, Madam Speaker, and I'm glad he mentioned that, because I represent folks in Northumberland–Peterborough South, and we had a letter from Alnwick/Haldimand township, from Gail Latchford, who supported the work that is being done and whose councillor was at the CA meeting, brought it back to council and had a robust discussion supporting the moves that our government is making on schedule 6. I thank you for the question.

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

Mr. Vincent Ke: Last Friday, I visited a company named Hans Steel Canada, a company which manufactures heavy and lightweight steel for the construction industry. During my visit, the CEO thanked our government for reducing the electricity price in our 2020 budget, Bill 229, which we are debating now. They said this will help them to make their products more competitive in the international market. They are looking forward to having this bill passed to ease the burden of heavy electricity costs.

My question to my colleague the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South: Could you please elaborate more about our government's comprehensive plan to help our struggling business owners unleash their full economic recovery?

Mr. David Piccini: I'm excited to answer this, because I didn't get a chance to talk about the "recover" part of my speech. What does that mean? What does the commercial electricity reduction mean for folks in Northumberland–Peterborough South? That means Jebco, Blommer Chocolate and Horizon Plastics, all of whom I called to let them know about the 14% to 16% reduction, said—quite tangibly, many of them were considering diversifying and moving their businesses to Ohio, to Michigan, but they're going to expand, Madam Speaker. It means Baxter's is now doubling, with a second location in Cobourg.

Madam Speaker, the Liberal government, propped up by the NDP, brought upon some of the highest electricity prices in the province—the highest. That drove people out, because what would they be doing? After everyone was unemployed, they would be saying, "Taxpayers come to bear for massive programming for the employed." What we'd rather do is make that adjustment, the right adjustment, and create jobs so that Blommer, Horizons and Jebco can grow and people have the dignity of a job.

1730

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

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I'm happy to rise and speak about Bill 229. The member from Northumberland–Peterborough South mentioned that his government talks about fiscal prudence and investments. I would ask the member, where is the money for the hospital in Brampton? Nowhere in this bill does it talk about an additional hospital in Brampton. Where is the money for that? You said that you would do it. The member for Brampton South said he would do it. The member for Brampton West said he was going to do it. But that didn't happen.

My question to the member talking about schedule 6, which has been slipped into this bill: Why do you think that the chair of the Greenbelt Council, David Crombie, and six other members resigned? Why do you think they did that?

Mr. David Piccini: I spoke about CAs and schedule 6, so I'm just going to answer that first question, because that was a good one. I don't represent Brampton, but I have colleagues who do. I have colleagues who do work tirelessly who have come to me on post-secondary education and talked about meeting the needs of the Brampton community.

What I would say to the member opposite is that this government has increased health care funding, the likes of which we've never seen before. But it's not just about the money and where's my hospital, where's my this and my that—it's about structural changes for the system to better lead to patient-centred care. Your community will benefit from the Ontario health teams. You will benefit from a staffing strategy to increase the number of PSWs to improve home and community care.

Yes, to the member opposite, I'm going to talk to my colleagues about the hospital, too, because our government is transforming health care for the better in the province of Ontario. Folks in Brampton know it and the folks across the province know it.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: It's always my pleasure to rise and today to speak to Bill 229, which is the government's budget measures bill, on its third reading.

This is a difficult time in our province, and I don't think the Ontario government has ever faced any challenge like this nor have the people of Ontario faced a pandemic like this. It has forced every Ontarian to stay away from their family and friends and to think carefully about their day-to-day actions. Many across the province are grieving over the loss of a loved one due to COVID-19. Others have lost work or wages or they're struggling to make ends meet. The wide range of COVID-19 impacts and the precautions we need to take to stop the spread have deeply affected Ontario. That's why we need a budget from this government that meets the challenge head on and helps Ontarians through this time.

Unfortunately, this budget does not rise to that challenge. The budget introduced by the government last month does not bring anything new to the table. There are no new actions to make Ontarians safer or healthier, even though the government has contingency reserve money in

the billions. The Financial Accountability Officer told us in October that the Ford government is sitting on \$9 billion earmarked to fight the pandemic, but this money is going unspent. This budget doesn't even undo the billions in cuts that this government introduced in their 2019 budget, including the planned cuts to education, social services and health. This budget was an opportunity to truly help the people of Ontario weather the pandemic. Instead this budget re-announces previous initiatives and the plan laid out here is almost identical to the spending plan that existed before the second wave. This budget is not responsive to the great need of our province to strengthen our health care and long-term-care system or social services.

Further, what is actually new in this budget is the attack on Ontario's conservation authorities. I have received hundreds of emails from residents of my riding of Hamilton Mountain about schedule 6 of this bill. Schedule 6 is about new appeals avenues allowing developers to bypass conservation authorities. It also removes citizens from the conservation authority boards and mandates that they be comprised of elected officials.

In my city of Hamilton, our conservation authority and the municipal government have come out against these changes. Councillor Lloyd Ferguson, who I never have quoted in this House, I am quite sure, is the chair of the Hamilton Conservation Authority. He wrote a letter to the Premier about this bill, which was published in the Hamilton Spectator. In the Spectator, Councillor Ferguson writes this: "The legislative changes appear to be an excessive intervention in local matters in an area where the province makes little financial contribution. In the case of HCA, the province contributes just two per cent of the annual revenues for the operating budget. The remaining 98 per cent of our funding comes from self-generated funds (60 per cent) and our municipal partners (38 per cent).

"Ontario's 36 conservation authorities were created 60-plus years ago to address concerns regarding the poor state of the natural environment and the need to establish programs based on watershed boundaries for natural resource management. We bring the local watershed science and information into decision-making to ensure that Ontario's communities are protected. We help steer development to appropriate places where it will not harm the environment or create safety risks for people.

"Proposed changes will make it easier for developers to go around or even work without conservation authority input. There would be new appeal avenues for development permit applications to go to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal ... and even the ability of the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry to issue certain permits, in place of the conservation authority."

The Hamilton Conservation Authority can see this bill for what it is: a way for the government to allow their development friends to bypass environmental concerns.

Further, the mayor of Hamilton, Fred Eisenberger, believes that these changes will encourage more development on environmentally sensitive lands. He is

saying, “I can’t, for the life of me, understand why they would put this on the table. It’s so misguided.”

It’s clear the entire province, municipalities, citizens, conservation authorities, environmental groups—they’re all opposed to these changes. However, this government is ignoring them all.

The MPP from Flamborough–Glanbrook, which is a riding that is a neighbour to mine, has said that the opposition is really “just a lot of noise from special interest groups.” Her own municipality, conservation authority and residents disagree. They all disagree. So who is she consulting with? This government has not been listening.

Just this weekend, half of Ontario’s Greenbelt Council resigned in protest of this bill. The chair, David Crombie, had this to say about schedule 6: “This is not policy and institutional reform. This is high-level bombing and needs to be resisted.” The people of Ontario needed this government to do the right thing and remove this schedule from the bill that will hurt our conservation authorities and the environment. Yet they continue to push ahead.

There are other issues in this budget bill other than the attack on the environment. When it comes to action on health care and long-term care that we need, this budget misses the mark. This budget does not give Ontario hospitals the \$500 million in one-time funding to address added cost from the COVID-19 response, but that amount won’t even cover hospital deficits from the first wave of the pandemic. According to the Ontario Hospital Association, the impact of COVID-19 on hospitals from April to June has resulted in \$850 million in deficits. The need is much greater than what this government is providing.

Further, when it comes to long-term care, this government has provided no additional help. New Democrats have been introducing legislation to improve the standard of care in long-term-care homes for years. The Time to Care Act, which mandates four hours of care, passed through this House with the support of the government members. The government even announced that it would eventually follow through with the four hours of standard care. Yet this budget doesn’t provide any specific resources to make four hours of care a reality. It does not speak to the need for increasing the number of personal support workers in this province and providing them with the working conditions and the pay that they deserve. Given how important they are to the well-being of the people in long-term care, imagine the disappointment of those workers, who the government has called heroes, to not be reflected in the government’s pandemic budget.

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This bill doesn’t take long-term-care homes out of the hands of for-profit operators. We know that every dollar for profit is taken out of front-line care. It has been proven that private long-term-care homes have had more deaths than public or not-for-profit.

Right now, in Hamilton, there are 19 long-term-care homes and retirement homes in an active outbreak, according to Hamilton public health. The second wave has already taken the lives of 250 people in long-term-care

homes across the province. There are hundreds across the province who are grieving right now, and they’re worried that their parent or their grandparent might be next, all because of the failure to secure our long-term-care homes and retirement homes from COVID-19.

In my riding, Grace Villa is a long-term-care home. They are suffering a terrible outbreak. I was recently there to show my support for the front-line workers at the home. They tell me that they are burnt out and they’re scared. We cried together. It’s horrible what you see going on there. You watch the workers come out in their full PPE, and you can just see the stress on their face. We did a car parade, and I just cried. I can’t even tell you how many times I cried that day, because these workers are so desperate and this government does nothing in this budget to help improve their lives or their working conditions.

Instead of working to address these issues, the Ford government introduced a bill to limit legal liability of long-term-care homes. It’s shameful. This bill passed in this House with all government members supporting it. There were families on the lawns and circling Queen’s Park in a car parade to show their disappointment and their disgust in this government’s heartless move to protect their friends in for-profit long-term-care homes.

In the previous budget, the government announced its intentions to cut public health funding by 27% and to merge public health units into 10 regionals. I also remember that they made retroactive cuts to municipal public health units, and then they had to apologize and backtrack because of the public outcry.

During this pandemic, we have come to see the value of having a fully funded public health care system. Many families and small businesses have come to rely on their local public health unit for advice and for ensuring health and safety measures for their families or patrons.

I want to thank Hamilton’s chief medical officer, Dr. Elizabeth Richardson, and her team, as well as Paul Johnson, the director of Hamilton’s emergency operations centre, who have both led our city through this crisis.

This budget doesn’t undo this government’s past errors in judgment when it comes to health care or other important areas. When it comes to public education, there is another faux pas in this budget, which could have provided the students of Ontario true resources, but it did not. There are currently 800 schools with confirmed COVID-19 cases and 10 schools that are closed, according to the government’s website. In Hamilton, the public school board has collapsed classes and eliminated hundreds of teachers because their enrolment fell due to COVID-19. Enrolment is down because families don’t think schools are safe, because this government refuses to fund smaller class sizes.

Further, the public board has drawn from its reserves and still needs funding. They’re asking for funding based on projected enrolment and a share of the federal money for schools. They’re expecting a deficit this year unless they get help.

So in the public board, classes are actually growing in size. Parents in my riding were shocked to hear this. I have

received a lot of correspondence from my constituents on this issue. They don't want their children exposed to the risk of contracting COVID-19. They want smaller and safer classes.

Further, we have been hearing from educational assistants in our office since school restarted. EAs travel between classes and sometimes between schools, breaking the cohorts, because there are so few of them. In Hamilton, we even have a shortage of school bus drivers, so some school routes are cancelled, and the buses we have are full and cohorting is simply impossible.

Soon, schools will break for the holidays and students will be with their families. As much as we tell people to stick with their immediate families, there are always going to be the folks who are going to have the small get-togethers or who must see their family for some reason. This has been true around every holiday, just like we've seen through Thanksgiving, and we will likely see cases surge after the Christmas break.

We need this government to fully fund a class size cap of 15 students per class for the pandemic, but this budget does not provide that, nor does it undo the pre-pandemic cuts to education which were made by increasing class size averages. It wasn't that long ago that this government's agenda was to increase class sizes and have fewer adults in the classroom to teach Ontario's two million students. For parents and educators not to see themselves or their needs reflected in this budget is disappointing.

This budget bill lacks the kind of forward-thinking initiatives that workers need. We all know that there are many workers who lost their jobs, who have reduced hours or income due to this pandemic. We've known since the first wave of lockdowns that this has been happening. And since the beginning, this government has relied on the federal government to support Ontario's workers.

We need to help workers who were laid off to get by, and that means direct financial assistance for families.

It means paid sick days for workers. I can't believe that it's still debatable here in this House—that people have not been given paid sick days. Has this pandemic shown us nothing—that the obvious need is to legislate the minimum standard for paid sick days for all workers? This is an obvious fix that would go a long way. Workers shouldn't be forced to choose between their health and their income. With paid sick days, a worker can stay home when they're sick, which would protect their co-workers and their customers. This is an easy way to help working families, but of course, this pandemic budget does not include it.

Helping working families would also mean providing a real protection against evictions. My office hears from constituents worried about evictions due to the pandemic. Most tenants don't even really know their rights. They don't know that there is a process with the Landlord and Tenant Board when it comes to evictions. They call us, scared, and ask us what they're going to do because they're about to lose their homes. We need real protection for tenants, and this government has failed to deliver this through this legislation and budget.

Further, when it comes to social assistance, this bill continues the shameful tradition of keeping people in poverty. Social assistance rates in Ontario are disgusting. People who receive ODSP or OW during this pandemic watched as the federal government determined that \$2,000 would be the amount for CERB, because they thought that was the amount that would help people get by. People who receive our poverty-level social assistance rates of about \$700 for a person receiving OW or about \$1,200 for a single person on ODSP felt rightfully angry. They watched the federal government basically admit that social assistance rates need to be higher. Social assistance recipients received a pandemic top-up of \$100 or \$200, but most did not even know about it or had to beg their caseworker for access to it—not to mention that the top-up was discontinued.

Furthermore, this bill doesn't provide any relief to the clawbacks from federal assistance programs. If someone receiving OW or ODSP lost their job due to COVID-19 and they applied for CERB, their OW or ODSP would be clawed back substantially.

This bill also has no forgiveness for any overpayments. We know that people were confused about CERB to begin with, and the federal government was approving everyone. I also recall that it took a long time to receive any answer from the Minister of Community and Social Services on whether CERB would be clawed back. And now the minister is hiring a fraud squad to go after people on social assistance. That's 17 full-time ministry employees who will investigate our most vulnerable Ontarians, who are living under the poverty line.

This budget does zero to increase social assistance rates. No additional money will go to social assistance recipients. That amounts to a cut, if you consider the rate of inflation for next year. It's shameful how the government forgets these individuals. This government shows such a disregard for social services—not just social assistance, but all social services. In fact, when you look at the actual spend for 2019-20 for community and social services, it seems like the government made a \$100-million cut. They underspent their own budgeted amount by that much.

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Children with disabilities have been shortchanged again by this government. The budget does not create more inclusive disabilities programs. Special-needs children need access to services like occupational therapy, speech-language pathology or behavioural therapy, regardless of their diagnosis.

The government has said a lot of nice words in bringing awareness about fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, but this budget has no actions to support these kids or their families—not to mention the Ontario Autism Program, which is still broken and people are still waiting; there is no progress in this budget.

The people of Ontario deserve a government that will fight for them—a government that will make the investments needed to weather this pandemic and ensure that people are safe and healthy. This budget doesn't bend the curve on COVID-19. It does not make interventions

needed to reduce COVID-19 in our communities, nor does it support the people of Ontario as they face a difficult winter.

People are anxious. They are expecting increasing restrictions as COVID-19 cases rise. We need to get ahead of this.

We need immediate funding relief for the hospital sector. We need to help them get on top of their deficits and prepare for the ongoing second wave.

We need to strengthen our public health agencies. We need to be hiring more staff to do contact tracing and boost testing.

We need to plan to hire more PSWs and make the profession more attractive to people looking for a new career. We need to ensure that their working conditions are fair and that they get a permanent wage boost which is in line with the importance of the value of their work.

We need to shrink class sizes and ensure that there are enough teachers and custodial staff and educational assistants for every school so that they aren't travelling around and breaking cohorts. The Minister of Education said he is not planning to keep schools closed for an extra two weeks after the holidays. That's a wise decision only if we can shrink those class sizes and keep the kids safe. We can mitigate the risk for kids in schools if we do what the experts recommend and fund smaller classes.

Speaker, I am grateful to have had this opportunity to be able to speak, to be able to have my say about what's not in this budget and what really should have been there.

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member from Hamilton Mountain for her speech today. I listened to the part about needing long-term care. I agree that we do need long-term care—because after 15 years of Liberal government, we only built 611 long-term-care beds.

In Mississauga–Lakeshore, we're using an MZO, with the city and the region on board, and we're going to be building 640 long-term-care beds right in my riding alone, as well as 219 affordable homes, with an MZO.

Why are you so against building long-term-care and affordable homes?

Miss Monique Taylor: The member from Mississauga–Lakeshore is obviously very confused. He is fed messaging and told to spew it back to us. If he had listened, he would have heard that we want more for long-term care.

We need beds all over the province; not just in your riding. If you can pull off plans and fix things for developers in the snap of a second, why can't you get shovels in the ground and build us more beds for long-term care? What's the wait? There's no time. Get it moving. People are dying.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The House will come to order.

Further questions, please.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I would like to thank my colleague from Hamilton Mountain for talking about what's not in this budget.

The government announced support for parents struggling due to additional learning and child care costs that the pandemic has brought on. Why does this support stop for youth 12 years of age? Parents of teens are facing even greater costs, including buying laptops and upgrading their Internet. Why are we not recognizing that support is needed for all school-aged children in Ontario? I'm talking about the ages between 13 to 18 that are not in this bill which is supposed to be in it—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you.

Response?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thanks to my colleague from York South–Weston. He's absolutely right. Families are struggling. If we have our teenagers at home and they're being schooled, they're obviously eating more. We know what it's like to have our kids at home. They're scrounging in the fridge and they want extra snacks. They need extra books and they need extra bus fare. Why would they cut off children at the age of 12? I have absolutely no idea, rather than to pinch pennies and save a buck when families truly need it.

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

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I want to thank the member opposite for her eloquent speech.

Now, as we all know, in Brampton and Brampton North, our area is a hot spot. We continue to see increasing case numbers.

The member opposite from Northumberland–Peterborough South, when I mentioned that we need an additional hospital in Brampton, his response was, "You need a hospital; they need a hospital; everybody needs a hospital," as if they don't care. We continue to see rising case counts. As a matter of fact, just the other day, in a long-term-care home, Hawthorn Woods Care Community, 84 staff and residents have active COVID-19 cases. We continue to see a very high positivity rate.

My question to the member: Schedule 6, which has been slid in there, how will this affect municipalities having the ability to make decisions vis-à-vis conservation authorities? And how will that create more red tape, which this government is opposed to?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member from Brampton North for this question. He's absolutely right. I'm hearing on a regular basis that on the other side, they're getting new schools, they're getting hospitals. I haven't heard any of that happening on this side of the House, which is truly unfortunate, but it's no different than what we're seeing with the conservation authorities.

We know that the Premier has made deals with developers when it came to getting into the greenbelt. We know that developers are looking—

Interjection.

Miss Monique Taylor: It was on video. Everybody has seen it, so it's not an argument.

We know that they're breaking down rules, taking away oversight and giving more show to their development friends. It's unfortunate. We know that every single

organization, municipality across the province is begging this government to remove this schedule, to do the right thing. But instead, they're choosing to listen to their developer friends.

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: For the life of me, I can't understand why the NDP in Ontario have abandoned the working families of this province, the working-class people. They've completely abandoned them.

Madam Speaker, I want to know why the NDP are opposing \$1 billion in spending for broadband. I want to know why this member is voting against 100 new health and safety inspectors. If this budget passes, we'll have more health and safety inspectors than in the history of this province. Why are you opposed to that?

Miss Monique Taylor: Even that the minister said it is laughable, Madam Speaker. It's not true. Of course we're going to be voting against their bill that has a poison pill. It never fails. Every budget bill that came from you, that came from the Liberals, you always throw something in there that has to go against what other parties have to say. You always find a way.

There should be measures that really support workers. How about paid sick days? How about real wage increases? How about doing the right thing by employees of this province instead of throwing something in a budget to help your developer buddies?

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm going to help my colleague out: Presumptive language for health care workers, why isn't that in there? I'm just asking.

So let's talk about schools. Experts have said we should have 15 kids in a classroom. Very interesting totals to me: total cases in classrooms, 5,266; students, 3,425; staff, 753—16.07% of schools in Ontario have COVID. They've closed 10 schools.

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My question to you is, why do you think the Conservative government will not invest in capping class sizes at 15 for the safety of our kids, our grandkids and the staff?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member for Niagara Falls for the question. It's very clear that the government is pinching pennies when it comes to our students: more kids in a classroom, no cohorting—you put a kid on a bus and you've broken every bubble and every cohort imaginable that the teachers and the schools are working so hard to do. It's so unfortunate. The members seemed like they were shocked when you read the numbers on what was actually happening in schools. Maybe they should start looking at that information so that they're informed, instead of just throwing stuff off that doesn't make sense here in the Legislature.

We need to get down to 15 kids a class. We have schools that are now underfunded because not enough kids are in the classroom, and it's because the parents don't feel that their kids are safe within these classrooms.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: I want to continue along the line of questioning from the Minister of Labour and ask the opposition: When did you lose your way? When did you lose the support of your base? All we hear is a tax on businesses and a tax on people who want a good job. If that isn't true, if you truly want to support the working men and women in Ontario, will you be supporting our government's investment of an additional \$181 million in employment services and training programs to connect workers in the industries most affected by COVID-19 so that we can address the skills shortage?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A quick response: the member from Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Protect, support and recover from COVID-19: How many schedules in this bill are actually doing that work? They missed the boat. They throw in things that have no business being in a COVID bill, just like every bill that they've put forward. And then they want to talk about the opposition. I think they need to check their own messaging on the other side.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The House will come to order, please and thank you.

Report continues in volume B.

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Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Walker, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Associate Minister of Energy / Ministre associé de l'Énergie Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakubski, Hon. / L'hon. John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Yurek, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Wayne Gates
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto
Wayne Gates, Randy Hillier
Andrea Khanjin, Jane McKenna
Judith Monteith-Farrell, Michael Parsa
Randy Pettapiece, Donna Skelly
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Amarjot Sandhu
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeremy Roberts
Ian Arthur, Stan Cho
Mitzie Hunter, Logan Kanapathi
Sol Mamakwa, David Piccini
Jeremy Roberts, Amarjot Sandhu
Sandy Shaw, Dave Smith
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Présidente: Goldie Ghamari
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Mike Schreiner
Robert Bailey, Jessica Bell
Goldie Ghamari, Chris Glover
Mike Harris, Daryl Kramp
Sheref Sabawy, Amarjot Sandhu
Mike Schreiner, Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Président: John Vanthof
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Taras Natyshak
Will Bouma, Lorne Coe
Robin Martin, Norman Miller
Taras Natyshak, Rick Nicholls
Billy Pang, Amanda Simard
Marit Stiles, Nina Tangri
John Vanthof
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Julia Douglas

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Roman Baber
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Roman Baber, Will Bouma
Lucille Collard, Parm Gill
Natalia Kusendova, Suze Morrison
Lindsey Park, Gurratan Singh
Nina Tangri, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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