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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 1 March 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 1^{er} mars 2021

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): 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 continue to rise as we listen to the 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.

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should increase student awareness and education about the importance of conservation for future generations and the benefits of ecological initiatives such as planting trees and protecting air, water and land through opportunities including student volunteer hours and taking part in the Provincial Day of Action on Litter.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation. I recognize the member for Markham–Thornhill.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Today, I am pleased to stand before the Legislature to introduce a motion that would enable Ontario students to make a meaningful contribution to the protection of the environment.

As a farmer's son, I was taught to respect and protect the environment. I have carried this lesson in my heart since the start of my public service, when I was elected to Ward 7 as councillor for the city of Markham in 2006. As a councillor, I felt there was a lack of green open spaces for the public to enjoy in the southeast part of Markham. Most households in the area were multiple-generation homes. Parkland studies failed to recognize the need for adequate green space for these families' unique needs. I made it my mission to expand the green space for these families. As a result, the city of Markham developed many new parks and parkettes in this area, creating an urban canopy for children, parents and grandparents to enjoy and explore.

I was also supportive of the Adopt-a-Park program, which encourages civic engagement, environmental and social responsibility and volunteerism among the citizens to build sustainable communities in Markham. I continue to support this great initiative today.

I also used to organize a litter cleaning day for residents. Many families enjoyed participating, and it became a way for parents to teach their children important lessons about preserving the beautiful world around them. I am proud to say litter cleanup day was a success. It kept our neighbourhoods and parks clean and free of litter, teaching an important lesson about taking care of our planet.

As a part of the community sustainability plan, I initiated a sustainable home and community garden in Ward 7, which taught families to plant their own home gardens. It was a huge success for Markham, providing a creative way for the whole family to participate in wholesome activities, focus on learning about sustainable food growth and be one with nature. A home garden provides more than just delicious food; it becomes a habitat for native species by creating shelter and food for wildlife.

Another initiative and product from my councillor days is Markham's textile and clothing reuse and recycling program. It is a game-changing example of a sustainable initiative to tackle both consumption and climate change. That now-permanent program began in 2015 with a textile recycling pilot program, making Markham the first city to prevent residents from leaving textiles at the curb.

Mr. Speaker, the lessons my father taught me about the environment are very important to me. In a way, they are part of the legacy he left behind. Climate change and environmental pollution cause serious challenges around the world. Our ability to reduce greenhouse gas emissions driving climate change around protecting the environment will go a long way towards defining the legacy we leave for our children and future generations. It requires a collective effort: Every one of us has a role to play.

The motion would educate Ontario secondary school students on the importance of conservation for future generations and the benefits of ecological initiatives through a series of activities such as replanting and participating in the Provincial Day of Action on Litter.

Madam Speaker, our government is committed to protecting and conserving our environment through our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan, which is a blueprint of action to protect air, water and land, to reduce litter and waste while lowering greenhouse gas emissions, helping communities prepare for climate change. This overarching plan commits Ontario to address the pressing challenges

of extreme weather events, keeping lands and waterways free of litter.

We are already on our way to meeting that target. Approximately 94% of the electricity generated in Ontario was emission-free in 2019, and the province's total greenhouse gas emissions have dropped by 22% since 2005. We are taking action to advance environmental protection with a combination of traditional standards-based approaches and new innovations like hydrogen fuel and clean technologies.

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Our government is also committed to protecting and expanding the greenbelt. The greenbelt consists of over two million acres of land in the greater Golden Horseshoe area, including farmland, forests, wetlands, and watersheds. The greenbelt provides resilience to extreme weather events by protecting the natural systems and features.

The Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan also recognizes the benefit of reducing litter and waste. Over the past 15 years, over 70% of waste material has ended up in landfills. However, most of the waste material can be reused or recycled; for example, turning organic waste into natural gas. Reducing litter and waste will lower production costs on specific products and save space in landfills.

The Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan also commits our government to connect students with recognized organizations that encourage environmental stewardship so they could earn volunteer hours by cleaning up parks, planting trees and participating in other conservation initiatives.

This day is all about stewardship, raising awareness and educating the public about the impact of litter and how they can help. We also want to teach students the importance of reducing, reusing and recycling to decrease the amount of waste we produce. They will also learn that litter in the environment can impact air, water, soil and wildlife.

Madam Speaker, if passed, today's motion will help meet this commitment by encouraging secondary school students to participate in environmental protection actions such as the Provincial Day of Action on Litter. Litter takes years to break down. It releases pollutants into the air, water and soil and can impact wildlife. This day is an excellent way to educate students about the negative impact of litter on the environment and how they can help to make a difference in their community.

Madam Speaker, protecting the environment is not just about reversing climate change. It is about helping define and promote the role of students in the community by encouraging civic-minded action. It is about the value of environmental stewardship, and passing it onto future generations. It also emphasizes the importance of taking responsibility for the environment by taking action.

I urge all of the members to support the motion I'm introducing to give young people a bigger role in protecting the environment and creating a safer, cleaner and more sustainable planet.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thanks to the MPP from Markham–Thornhill for this motion, which we will be supporting. MPP Kanapathi may mean well, but unfortunately, he's part of a government that has caused so much damage to the environment. This government has gutted environmental protections and stripped conservation authorities of the ability to protect natural spaces. You talked about tree planting, but you cut the \$50-million tree planting program, for heaven's sakes. And now we have the municipal affairs minister issuing MZOs that are fast-tracking development on sensitive lands. It is a matter of record that many of these MZOs directly benefit this government's connected party donors. Clearly, they are hell-bent to push through development, even if that means paving over wetlands or building Highway 413 through swaths of dwindling agricultural land and the greenbelt.

However, Madam Speaker, the greatest insult that this motion represents has to be to the young people across the world and right here in Ontario. This government has zero credibility when it comes to the environment and it has no right whatsoever to tell youth anything when it comes to their futures, because surely you know that young people and students have been desperately trying to raise the alarm. Greta Thunberg, Fridays for Future: Is anyone on that side of the House paying attention?

Right here in Ontario, the Attorney General is currently fighting youth in court who are suing this government for weakening Ontario's climate targets. Of that fight, 13-year-old Sophia Mathur had this to say: "I shouldn't have to miss school to meet with politicians to convince them that my generation, my future is worth fighting for.

"And I shouldn't have to take our own government to court to defend our right to a safe climate and healthy environment."

This government will also know that Nestlé removes billions of litres of water from community aquifers, including from treaty lands where many First Nations communities still don't have access to clean drinking water. Makaşa Looking Horse is a young water protector from the Lakota and Mohawk Wolf Clans who started a campaign to confront this problem. She had this to say: "Knowing that my community doesn't have clean drinking water, and then a large corporation like Nestlé is making billions off of our water, is maddening."

The climate crisis is the single-greatest threat humanity has ever faced. Scientists warn that we are in the sixth mass extinction, with more than 500 species of animal on the brink of extinction—but we do have litter day, thanks to the MPP for Barrie–Innisfil. But I have to say that Ontarians don't need this government to take credit for what has already been happening for years in our communities across Ontario. Volunteers from neighbourhood associations to school groups put in countless hours to clean up litter from roadways, local parks and local waterways. This is to be highly commended.

For example, in Hamilton, volunteers have spent thousands of hours cleaning up Cootes Paradise and restoring natural plantings, and shoreline cleanups like the one held by the Youth for Lake Simcoe are fantastic. However, no

amount of litter pick-up will help Hamilton with the 24-billion litres of raw sewage that flowed into Cootes Paradise, and a shoreline clean-up for Lake Simcoe will not help with the algae blooms and phosphorus loads that are only increasing with development pressure. And it won't help to address concerns that communities have that this government will water down the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan.

Our support of this motion is tinged with much remorse, because our young people deserve so much better. This government is failing our young people when they side with insiders and developers over the environment. This government is failing our young people when they protect big corporations like Nestlé instead of protecting our water. This government is putting future generations at risk. They don't need this motion to understand this; they already know.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Good morning. I am a strong believer that education is at the core of everything we know and everything we do. It is where everything starts—the good as much as the bad. Through effective and engaging education, we can inspire youth to get involved with building a better tomorrow.

Youth of all generations have led change throughout the years, and it's important that we encourage their initiatives. We know that our children care about the environment. We watched them flood the streets of cities around the world in the fall of 2019, and many of us joined them in their advocacy.

In my riding of Ottawa–Vanier, I meet with a provincial youth council monthly to hear what issues are on their minds and what changes they would like to see. It has been clear from the beginning that protecting the environment is absolutely a priority for them. I also see this care in my own home. My four children have been advocates for fighting climate change and are always vocal about expecting better action from the government.

Youth bring passion and innovation to the subject of environmental conservation. Their ideas push past boundaries of traditional ways of thinking, and our policies would be better off with their input.

With proper awareness and education, we can help foster this sense of innovation and motivation in today's youth. We can ensure they all have the tools they need to put their thoughts into practice.

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Les jeunes apportent de l'enthousiasme et de l'innovation au sujet de la conservation de l'environnement. Leurs idées repoussent les limites des modes de pensée traditionnels, et nos politiques bénéficieraient de leurs contributions. Avec une sensibilisation et une éducation appropriée, nous pouvons contribuer à favoriser ce sens de l'innovation et de la motivation chez les jeunes d'aujourd'hui. Nous pouvons nous assurer qu'ils disposent de tous les outils dont ils ont besoin pour mettre leurs idées en pratique.

Bien que je sois encouragée par cette volonté de sensibiliser les étudiants, il nous faut reconnaître la

contradiction entre cette motion et les actions de ce gouvernement.

While I am encouraged by the eagerness of this government to increase student awareness, I can't help but recognize the conflict between this motion and the actions of the government. We have seen cuts to environmental protection measures in favour of speed, centralization and development all throughout this government's mandate. This motion seeks to increase awareness about the importance of conservation, but mere months ago, the government stripped away powers from conservation authorities. By moving all the discretionary decision powers from conservation authorities to the minister, the government completely centralized power over the environment within their inner circle. These changes remove the ability of conservation authorities to protect wetlands from destruction, which will have very negative effects not only on the environment, but also on the economy.

More recently, we learned that this government has issued 37 ministerial zoning orders, directives that deny Ontarians the opportunity to voice concerns or appeal to plan development. Some 14 cases raised environmental concerns, and while some projects were crucial, others didn't need to be fast-tracked and would have benefitted from proper consultation. If conservation is important for future generations, like this motion states, shouldn't environmental protection be a collective effort?

Chaque jour que ce gouvernement ne donne pas la priorité à la protection de l'environnement, il laisse tomber les générations futures qui vont vivre avec les conséquences de nos décisions. Bien que je soutienne cette initiative de sensibiliser nos jeunes à ce sujet, nous devons également les écouter.

Every day that the government fails to prioritize environmental protection, they are letting down the future generation that will have to grapple with our decisions. Youth care deeply about their communities, and they know what kind of future they want to create. It is crucial that we both educate them and listen to them. I am happy to support this motion, but let us not forget about how important it is to work and do what needs to be done to actually protect and conserve our environment.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the opportunity to rise. I'll be brief, because I know the member for Haldimand–Norfolk also wants to say a few words.

Just to congratulate the member from Markham–Thornhill: As many colleagues may or may not know, as a long-term councillor in the city of Markham, environmental stewardship and working with youth are something that he has been passionate about for as long as I've known him, and it really was one of the reasons why he decided to make the jump here. His record in Markham in helping our youth and in making sure that reforestation and tree planting are vital to the city of Markham, I think, is very well known.

I'll say this: Obviously we're going to support the motion. It's a good motion and I'm certainly glad that all

members on all sides of the House are going to support this.

One of the opportunities that we have in our community that the member and I share is an organization called 10,000 Trees for the Rouge. I know that is one day that we all look forward to. It is an organization that takes parts of the Rouge that can't be farmed and plants trees on it. They have been doing this for as long as I can remember. The fascinating thing about that is, it has become a day when hundreds of families come out with their kids, the entire family, and they're educated on how to properly plant trees. It has become something that we all look forward to. It is educational, it gets you out and it helps the environment.

Look, there are a lot of things that we can do on improving the environment. I fundamentally believe that we all want a better and cleaner environment; we just disagree on how we might get there. I think this motion reaffirms that this Legislature believes in those principles and that we want to make sure that future generations understand how important it was to us.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning. It's always a pleasure to rise here in the Legislature to speak on behalf of my constituents in the great riding of Davenport. I want to thank the member from Markham–Thornhill for this motion and the member from Hamilton–West–Ancaster–Dundas, who is our new critic for the environment, conservation and parks, for her comments. I think we would agree generally on these, absolutely.

You know, Madam Speaker, young people in this province largely learn about the environment and conservation in school. They learn about climate change. They learn about these things in our education system as it exists right now under the publicly funded education system. But with this government, they like to put forward these private members' motions designed to make it look like they're doing something to fight climate change.

I listened to the member opposite just now talk about this motion in great glowing terms. And it sounds fine. There's nothing I particularly disagree with here. But what I really find offensive is that this government is trying to present the idea that they are actually fighting climate change. If you look at the government's actual bills, if you look at the environmental laws, if you look at their attack on the structures that are designed to protect our environment, most recently Bill 197, the gutting of the authority that is there to protect watersheds—do you know what? I think that this government would do well to actually listen to the young people of this province.

I talk to a lot of students. It's one of the great things about being the education critic and also having been a school board trustee in the past and a parent myself of young people. I listen to a lot of young people, a lot of teenagers in particular, talking about what their priorities are. Without fail, almost every time, their number one priority is fighting climate change. They feel very strongly about that issue. We see it on the lawns of Queen's Park,

of this Legislature, on most Fridays. It's changed a little under the pandemic, but those young people are still doing that important work here in Ontario and around the world. This government likes to talk at students, but they very rarely sit and listen, and they would do well to do so.

I want to quote a few people for you, a few students that I have met. I know that the member previous mentioned Sophia Mathur from Sudbury, who is an incredible activist, but I want to mention a few others. I think it's important to bring those voices into this Legislature at every possible opportunity.

Let's try this one: Cooper Price, 16. He says, "Our main concern is that coming out of this pandemic is that governments will completely forget about the environment and just try to put forward policies that quickly rebuild an unsustainable economy. So while this could have been a really, really big opportunity for complete reset in how governments tackle climate change, our fear is that they've ... done" quite "the opposite."

I want to quote as well Ruby Swartz, 18, who is actually one of the activists with Fridays for Future. She says, "I've personally been very frustrated with the way that the Ontario government has dealt with the climate crisis. I feel like the government is selling my future." I could not agree with her more.

Eden Brown, 17, says, "We want a recovery that puts the environment, and workers, and marginalized communities first, because those are often communities that are affected the most by the climate crisis, and we don't think the Ford government is doing that."

Madam Speaker, this government has ignored youth activism, has ignored climate change in their policies. I think this government would do well to join us in the opposition on the lawns of Queen's Park speaking with those students and listening to them.

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to, first of all, acknowledge and thank my colleague the member for Markham–Thornhill for his leadership in this Legislature to ensure environmental protection is a steward and a principle that is advanced for future generations. I also want to thank him for his long tenured public service and advocacy for the protection of our land, water and air.

Madam Speaker, I rise in full support of this private member's bill introduced by my colleague and friend, a champion of both the next generation and the protection of our natural environment. The Ontario government environmental protection awareness for students motion is incredibly worthwhile. I hope that all my honourable colleagues on all sides will continue to show their support.

Much like the member from Markham–Thornhill noted, the riding I'm fortunate enough to represent, one that I grew up in for the vast majority of my life, is located in the stunning natural beauty of the ecologically significant Oak Ridges moraine. Surrounded by ancient woodlands, the people of King and Vaughan are natural environmentalists, even if some don't identify themselves as such. We

understand the importance of healthy forests to our ecosystems, and we know that Ontario needs both development and conservation.

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I support my colleague's motion for a number of reasons, because it will help our province set a course to further reduce its carbon footprint and positively impact many local ecosystems by encouraging the reforestation of this province. Trees are critical and perform several critical tasks by providing us with life-saving and life-giving oxygen, and consuming carbon dioxide as they filter out harmful dust and pollutants. Trees help keep our urban areas cool in the summer. They reduce excess water runoff after a storm. They offer food, protection and homes to many birds and mammals.

Speaker, the member's motion makes sense. It fits with the broader vision of the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan and Ontario's provincial day of action, which takes place this year on May 11. If I may, I just want to recognize my colleague from Barrie–Innisfil for her leadership in making that day a reality in this province.

There's obviously action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which have decreased significantly since 2000. Our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan is helping to continue that trend. But I do want to take some exception with my honourable colleagues across the way, in the context of making the case that conservation is at the core of our conservatism. It would not be lost on us, as students of history, to reflect on what our party, our movement, has stood for in the context of promoting conservation. After all, the largest expansion of forests and parks in the history of this province happened under a Progressive Conservative government. The first government to close a coal plant commenced under a Progressive Conservative government. The first government to create for future generations the Oak Ridges Moraine Protection Act that has, for generations now, for a full generation, ensured the protection of this critical watershed—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Order.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The party of the acid rain treaty; the party that helped to create the TTC—the vast majority, the overwhelming majority, of Ontario's subways. The alternative, Speaker, notwithstanding the heckling from the members opposite, is a plan that raises taxes on working parents, a plan that raises taxes on seniors on fixed incomes and on pensioners, a plan that regressively kills jobs at a time in our economic recovery when we need to make sure our industry is competitive with the world. That is the alternative, and it's one we're proud to campaign on because, for us, environmental protection should not be incompatible with economic growth. Both can be done, and it is our party that wants to ensure that both can be done, for the purpose of jobs but also because, as Conservatives, we believe conservation is critical to the maintenance of our natural spaces.

If we're going to reach our goal, Madam Speaker, of getting greenhouse gas emissions to 30% of our 2005 levels, we're going to need more trees, we're going to need

to encourage more reforestation in this province. Should it pass in this chamber, this motion will help us make even more progress towards achieving our carbon emission reduction targets.

Speaker, the motion is well worth supporting for that reason alone, but also in my capacity as a member, in addition to being the Minister of Education, I know many young people are deeply concerned about how we can protect the environment for their future. I commend the member from Markham–Thornhill for drafting a motion that would enable Ontario secondary students to make a meaningful contribution in the conservation of our land, our air and our water.

I believe that the environmental awareness program would benefit significantly and create more awareness about how they can make a difference in their own communities. They would temporarily put away, potentially, their smart phones for a moment, spend a few hours in the sunlight and fresh air, and return home with the personal satisfaction of helping to ensure we protect the environment for future generations. They would acquire valuable volunteering experience as well as leadership and teamwork skills that will last a lifetime. It is for that reason that we continue to support this, because given a choice between apathy and cynicism as advanced by the members opposite, or the opportunity to make a positive difference, young people will choose the latter each and every day.

Madam Speaker, I conclude with a note of recognition and thanks to the member from Markham–Thornhill for his leadership and for continuing to stand up for young people, for our environment and for the conservation of our green spaces.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's a pleasure to be able to rise and address this motion this morning. My thanks to the member from Markham–Thornhill for bringing it forward.

I have to ask, however, Speaker, why? We are in a situation in this great province, somewhat like a great ship on the ocean. where we have a captain who, instead of acting like the captain of the Titanic who tried to avoid the iceberg, is ramming the iceberg, while at the same time this member is making paper boats to put out on the water. I mean, I like paper boats. But in terms of the impact on the people of this province, their future, their lives, it's the actions of this government, it's the war on the environment, that are going to make the biggest difference. This motion will not make that difference.

What are the lessons that young people will learn from the actions of this government—not from this motion; from the actions of this government. We have a government that has demolished action on climate. It has a plan, so-called, that it is ignoring. I hear about this environment plan that's been put forward by the government, but its own agencies turn their backs on it. They are not implementing it. That is the reality. What is the lesson young people should take from that? What is the lesson they should take from that?

We have had this government in its first few months cancel a renewable energy project, a wind farm, one that

was almost completed in its construction, that had to be demolished, and then again it tried to stop another wind farm producing clean energy, helping make conservation happen. They were, happily, unsuccessful in that.

If we're going to have clean air, we need to have a conversion away from gas-burning cars to electric vehicles. What has this government done about that issue? It cancelled subsidies; it ripped out charging points at GO stations; it changed the building code so that new homes don't have to have charging stations incorporated in them. That was the cheapest point for doing that. If you want to have clean air, you have to change the system of transportation. This government has undermined the crucial steps necessary to have that happen.

And then, it didn't stop there. Conservation authorities: We saw the assault on conservation authorities last year. If those conservation authorities, set up to protect people from being swept away by flood waters in the night—which is what we saw with Hurricane Hazel. If they don't have the power and authority to protect people from floods, if they don't have the power and authority to protect those natural areas, well, what is the meaning of conservation when it comes to this government? What is the lesson that young people need to take from all of this?

Speaker, we are in a situation where feel-good motions are not going to make up for this government's constant, unremitting attacks on the environment of this province and the people of this province. In the end, the lesson that young people will take, not from this motion but from the actions of this government, is very simple: If they do not mobilize in the thousands and fill the streets demanding climate action, they will be left to a very bitter future. If they don't act to throw this government out in the next election, their fate is very, very troubled.

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

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I'm proud to stand in the House today to support my colleague from Markham–Thornhill on his motion to bring students' involvement in the environment to the forefront through stewardship programs. This speaks to the legacy of the member from Markham–Thornhill, who has always stood beside the environment, helping students get more involved. It's very complementary of our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan, which is titled Preserving and Protecting our Environment for Future Generations. It's because we want to give students hope and opportunity so that they can actually do something about the environment, things that are tangible so they can make a difference; things like our day of action on litter that I introduced in this Legislature, which was supported by all members, so I thank you for that.

I'm glad they're going to be supporting this motion, because this leads to a legacy of things that we are trying to do to help students. For example, on the second anniversary of our environment plan we talked about establishing a youth climate advisory group so, again, they can take action and work with the government. Youth around the province work with the Ontario government through things

like the Ministry of Natural Resources. They have a stewardship youth ranger team, which has done great work around Lake Simcoe. And of course—I've talked about them many times—we've got Zoe and the Youth for Lake Simcoe that are taking action as well. This motion today is an opportunity to thank all those students for all the work they do and, of course, inspire the next generation so they can learn that lesson and take it to their parents and take it to their community.

In budget 2020, we committed a further support to Earth Rangers by investing \$100,000 over two years on youth-focused conservation organization activities to, again, inspire more youth to take action in their communities.

0940

We're not just stopping there, Speaker. There are plenty of things that we are looking to get students involved in, and this member's motion is going to benefit that and benefit all the actions that we want to take for clean air, clean water and, of course, clean land.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: I appreciate the opportunity to offer my support to the member from Markham–Thornhill for this motion. As he mentions, he learned from his father about tree planting. I learned from my father and my grandfather. We've planted hundreds of acres on our farms in southern Ontario. In fact, it could be another month from now when we can all be out there planting trees again, which I do every year.

You mentioned greenhouse gases. This is something we've been debating since the 1950s. Some people have recently discovered this issue. I have a Globe and Mail article from 1953 that talks about the greenhouse effect. I put this forward: The answers lie in forestry and farming.

We talked a lot about greenhouse gases when I taught environmental science at the high school level in the 1970s. I'm very pleased that our Minister of Education spoke in support of this motion from my friend Logan. During that course, we covered everything back in the day, from pipelines to sustainable agriculture. The kids loved the course. The second year I taught it, the enrolment doubled with this course. I fully support more initiatives to be brought back within our high school system.

The member mentioned that he learned from his father. I have seen photographs of Logan's father. He was a farmer. My family had farms in Markham. That was 200 years ago. Remember?

Ms. Donna Skelly: I remember that.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I'm not sure what those farms look like now. But the member learned from his father. Ensuing generations will learn from this member. I fully support this initiative.

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

Back to the member for Markham–Thornhill for a two-minute reply.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I would like to thank you again for giving me an opportunity to present my motion. I

would like to take this opportunity to thank Minister Calandra, the government House leader and member for Markham–Stouffville, for the great work he did; he worked tirelessly, he worked hard on bringing in the largest park in Ontario to Parks Canada. I can remember that.

I'd like to thank Minister Lecce, the education minister. Thank you for your leadership in encouraging me on this motion, for the personal support and encouraging me to reach out to students through this motion. Thank you for your leadership, again.

Also, to my colleague from Barrie–Innisfil, thank you for passing the PMB on the Provincial Day of Action on Litter. Thank you for your leadership in taking care of the planet in our lifetime.

Also, I would like to thank the member for Haldimand–Norfolk for passionately talking about his farm and his father's farm and the generations of farms in Markham. I'm proud to see his passion for farming.

I also thank our colleague the member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas for your remarks, the member for Davenport for the different perspective and for your input, and also the member from Ottawa–Vanier for your remarks, and the member for Danforth as well.

Madam Speaker, I urge all of the members to support the motion I introduced today. Participating in activities such as the Provincial Day of Action on Litter and tree planting will help students to understand how their decisions and actions affect their environment with the knowledge and skills necessary to address the environmental issues, as well as how we can take action to keep our environment healthy and sustainable for the future. This will create an environmentally responsible generation.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Mr. Kanapathi has moved private member's notice of motion number 140. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? That is carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Orders of the day? I recognize the member for Barrie–Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): There being no further business, this House stands recessed until 10:15.

The House recessed from 0945 to 1015.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Good morning. Thunder Bay is experiencing a COVID-19 crisis, and I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone back home working on that. After months of very low case numbers, we have outbreaks throughout our community in long-term care, our shelters and our schools. Our hospitals that serve all of northwestern Ontario are stretched to the limit.

The impact on everyone as we are locked down yet again is immeasurable. People are dying. Families continue to be separated. Children, parents and teachers are struggling. Small businesses are struggling. Many seniors remain isolated and afraid, not understanding why it's taking so long for the vaccines to roll out. We all have our stories and we've all tried our best, but we need this government to step up.

We have tried to advise that the slow course of action on outbreaks just does not work. It especially doesn't work when we were clearly in a crisis a month ago. Our calls to action went unheeded; our community is paying for that now.

This government needs to start understanding the needs of the north. Will this government finally do the right thing and get Thunder Bay everything—everything—it needs to get these situations under control? Get us the human and financial resources to stop this. Lives are depending on you.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Lorne Coe: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities recently announced an additional \$7 million to help increase access to mental health and addiction services for post-secondary students during COVID-19.

To assist local post-secondary students with access to the mental health services and supports they need, the government is providing Durham College in Whitby with approximately \$374,000. This much-needed funding will strengthen community partnerships, increase the number of mental health workers and programs, and immediately expand access for students to the provincial mental health and addiction system during COVID.

Speaker, providing students with access to mental health supports and services when they need them is a critical piece to a student's health and well-being. We will continue to work with and support our post-secondary sector partners like Durham College, Ontario Tech and Trent University to create a learning environment that helps Durham region students succeed in education and in life.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Suze Morrison: COVID-19 has intensified food insecurity in my riding of Toronto Centre. Coupled with the high cost of housing, precarious employment and insufficient income supports, food security in my riding is worsening. Low-wage workers who have lost their jobs; Black, Indigenous and racialized community members; and people experiencing homelessness have all been hardest hit. In some cases, people are opting to eat less in order to pay their bills or pay their rent.

Seeing the urgent need for help in our community, the Cabbagetown BIA partnered with Dixon Hall and St. Luke's United Church to create the Cabbagetown Cares lunch program. This is a unique initiative that helps folks experiencing food insecurity, while at the same time also

supporting local small businesses in the neighbourhood. The weekly lunch program provides healthy meals supplied from local restaurants to over 100 people a week in Allan Gardens. The organizers of the program hope that it will build bridges and connections that will last beyond the pandemic.

I'm happy to share the successes of this community initiative with this House, but we need permanent solutions to poverty, homelessness and income insecurity. No one in Ontario should go hungry because they can't afford food, and communities shouldn't be the ones stepping up to fill the gaps in our systems because this government refuses to address the upstream root causes of poverty and homelessness.

Speaker, we need increases to OW and ODSP. We need paid sick days and an increase to the minimum wage. We need more affordable housing, and our municipalities need the financial resources to navigate the homelessness crisis. When will this government finally act?

1020

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Mike Harris: Under the leadership of retired General Rick Hillier, Ontario has made huge strides in getting our front-line health care heroes and highest-risk populations fully immunized against COVID-19. Thanks to our local COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force, led by Waterloo Regional Police Service Deputy Chief Shirley Hilton, I am pleased to report that our region is also making headway in rolling out the vaccines through our mobile teams and the vaccination clinic at Grand River Hospital.

Health care workers and long-term care residents have been the top priority. Just two weeks into the new year, the vaccination of long-term-care residents began at Golden Years in Cambridge, and by January 25, with the support from our government to meet the deadline set by our Premier and General Hillier, all local long-term residents have received their first dose.

It is humbling to see the growing number of people in my community be protected from this virus, and barring any further supply challenges, this momentum will continue. Earlier this week, an online portal was launched so those over 80 could pre-register for their shot—and I'll quickly mention, for seniors without access to Internet, you can also call 519-575-4400. As we begin to expand capacity and ramp up for phase 2, plans for large-scale and mid-size clinics are underway locally with Deputy Chief Hilton making it a goal to administer 12,000 doses per day.

There has been great progress since December when the first PSW from Elmira was vaccinated. With Ontario leading the country in the number of doses administered, I'll close out by echoing our Premier, that hope is on the horizon.

ANCASTER COMMUNITY FOOD DRIVE

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It's always a pleasure to rise in the House, and it is my pleasure now to announce that the

Ancaster Community Food Drive is going virtual in 2021. For almost three decades, people from Ancaster from schools, businesses and local faith groups have come together to raise food for our community. In fact, in the 28 years since the food drive has been taking place, they've actually raised 1,856,500 pounds of food for food banks in our community.

We know that during this pandemic the need is greater than ever, and so rather than donations of food, the Ancaster Community Food Drive is asking for people to make a financial contribution. People can go online to ancasterfooddrive.ca to make a donation. The campaign runs until March 6.

I would just like to take this time to say thank you to all of the volunteers who have worked so hard for so many years to make this food drive the kind of success that it is and to make the people of Ancaster proud. I would also just like to say that I give a personal shout-out to my friend Jan, who makes sure that these things run every year without problems.

While we can't all be together for the Ancaster food drive in our Ancaster fairgrounds this year, we're all looking forward to being there for the 30th anniversary of the Ancaster Community Food Drive.

WAYNE ROBERTS

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It is an honour to rise today to celebrate the life of my dear friend and mentor Wayne Roberts, who we tragically lost on January 20. As the manager of the Toronto Food Policy Council, the author of 12 books and a columnist for Now Magazine, Wayne played a vital role in energizing and diversifying the local sustainable food movement. City food charters and policy councils across Ontario and around the world were inspired by Wayne. He won many awards, including the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and a lifetime achievement award from Food Secure Canada.

I first met Wayne 25 years ago and was instantly moved by his wit, his wisdom and his booming laugh. His book *Get a Life!* inspired me to start a local food business, and his work with the Coalition for a Green Economy still influences my views on politics and policy. I loved working with Wayne and his wife, Lori, promoting Ontario food and farmers with Local Food Plus. Speaker, there's a reason Wayne is known as the godfather of the local food movement in Ontario.

When you shop at a farmers' market, harvest from a community garden, or find local food at the nearest green grocer, think of my dear friend Wayne. He will be missed, but not forgotten, and his legacy will live on in the local food movement in Ontario.

JACKIE KELLY-PEMBERTON AND STEVEN PEMBERTON

Mr. Jim McDonell: I rise today to congratulate a farming couple from the small community of Inkerman, North Dundas, who received a 2021 Environmental Stewardship

Award from the Beef Farmers of Ontario. Jackie and Steven Pemberton have been recognized for their efforts to incorporate research and innovation as part of a farming strategy with an eye toward long-term sustainability, and for their contributions to the community and beyond.

The Pembertons' environmental focus on research has led to partnership projects with Carleton University and the federal government, along with other organizations, on a number of issues, including agricultural adaptation to climate change, crop genetics' impact on biodiversity and manure storage pits.

Jackie and Steven are also community leaders when they're not on the farm. They invest their time and expertise in stewardship programs, education, promoting clean water strategies and nutrient management. They continue their volunteer roles with local associations and committees, including the Dundas county agriculture and cattlemen's associations. Jackie is currently the Ontario Federation of Agriculture regional director and acts as a liaison for the Beef Farmers of Ontario.

I wish the Pembertons continued success in their farm operations and their educational and community involvement. Jackie and Steven, you are the pride of Dundas county.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, people are tired out from this pandemic. They've felt the isolation and frustration from staying at home. They've felt loss with the death of loved ones and anxiety when they have a friend or relative who comes out with a positive COVID diagnosis. They've had it, which is why they can't believe it when they see this government isn't doing everything it possibly can to bring this pandemic under control.

Week after week, month after month in this House, we have been demanding a paid sick leave program that would protect workers and their families and protect all of us, and that would drive down the numbers and allow us to get past this pandemic more quickly. You would think, given the cost of the pandemic, that it would not be a big fight, that it would be a very simple, straightforward thing, but it has not happened, Speaker, and that is a major problem for people in this province.

We're also in a situation where we're not on top of things with vaccinations. We're seventh out of 10 provinces in terms of people getting vaccinated. Just last week we were told it will be March 15 before people could book inoculations—March 15. We've known about vaccines since last fall.

It is not too late to save people's lives and to bring this pandemic under control. We need to act now.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Next Monday, Monday March 8, is International Women's Day. This is a time to take the opportunity to reflect on the hard-fought progress of

women and the men who have supported them on their journey toward real gender equality.

In 2019, I had the pleasure of hosting the first ever International Women's Day breakfast and high tea in my riding of Carleton. Not only was it a fantastic way to support local women business owners like Debbie, the owner of Danbys Roadhouse in Richmond; it was a great way for women and their families to come out and celebrate themselves and their accomplishments. In fact, the last two events that I hosted in 2020, right before COVID hit, were my second annual International Women's Day breakfast in Richmond and high tea in Metcalfe.

The 2021 International's Women's Day theme is #ChooseToChallenge. We can all choose to challenge and call out gender bias and inequality. We can all choose to seek out and celebrate women's achievements. While this year, unfortunately, I won't be able to host my International Women's Day events to celebrate the amazing women of Carleton, I choose to rise in the House today to acknowledge their accomplishments and celebrate their achievements.

To all the amazing women of Carleton, including my three staff, Candice, Hina and Navita: Happy International Women's Day. I can't wait to celebrate again with all of you in 2022.

1030

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Norman Miller: First, I want to recognize the challenges that today's move into the grey lockdown COVID framework presents for businesses and individuals across Muskoka. At the same time, two vaccine clinics are opening in Muskoka today to offer vaccines to those 85 and older. This is great news for seniors around Muskoka, but not the only good news for seniors in Parry Sound—Muskoka recently.

Last month, I was thrilled to announce that our government is investing more than \$6.1 million to expand the Community Paramedicine for Long-Term Care Program across the riding. More specially trained paramedics will offer non-emergency services like community wellness clinics, home visits and remote monitoring of vital signs. This will help seniors stay safe in their homes while they wait for space in long-term care.

Jeff McWilliam, chief of Muskoka Paramedic Services, said that the funding will be used to expand remote patient monitoring and other services. Frank May, manager of the Parry Sound District EMS, explained how the program can allow patients to be examined by specialists using equipment like remote stethoscopes, without having to travel to an urban centre. In both regions, this funding will be used to hire and train more community paramedics to offer services seven days a week.

Thank you to the Minister of Long-Term Care for recognizing the need for this program, particularly in rural areas that struggle to attract doctors, and thank you to all the paramedics and health care partners involved in the

existing community paramedicine programs and to those who developed the plans to expand these services.

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

The member for London West I understand has a point of order.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Yes, point of order, Speaker: I seek unanimous consent to move a motion regarding the accelerated passage of Bill 239, the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, to help in the fight against COVID-19.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for London West is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion regarding the accelerated passage of Bill 239, the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, to help fight against COVID-19. Agreed? I heard a no.

VICE-CHAIR OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I wish to inform the House that the official opposition House leader and MPP for London West has provided me with notice of her intent to raise a point of privilege, and I'm prepared to hear it at this time. I recognize the member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much, Speaker. As you know, I sent a letter to you last week raising concerns about a possible breach of privilege regarding this government's decision to name a government MPP as Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee on Estimates. I very much appreciate this opportunity this morning to highlight a few of the points I made in my letter.

The Standing Committee on Estimates is one of three committees whose chairships are explicitly restricted in the standing orders. The standing orders outline two classes of committees, six whose chairships are distributed in proportion to the number of seats each party holds in the House and three with specified leadership requirements. Standing order 120(b) reads as follows:

"The Chair of the Standing Committee on Estimates shall be a member of a recognized party in opposition to the government, the Chair of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs shall be a member of the party forming the government and the Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts shall be a member of the party forming the official opposition."

The rule that the estimates committee Chair must be a member from a recognized opposition party has been in place since that committee was formally established in 1989. This is in keeping with the responsibility of oversight that our system of parliamentary democracy places on the opposition. In the 30-plus years since then, the Vice-Chair, whose sole and only responsibility is to sit in for the Chair, has always been from the same party as the Chair. This has been the practice in successive Parliaments helmed by all three major parties, including the current government for more than two thirds of its current mandate.

The government will likely argue that the standing orders are silent on the matter of Vice-Chair. The official

opposition submits, however, that the requirement that the Vice-Chair come from a recognized opposition party is implicit in standing order 120(b). The rules clearly and unequivocally state that the Chair must come from a recognized opposition party. That is without question. But the sole reason that the Vice-Chair role exists is to fill in for the Chair in instances where the Chair is unable to carry out her or his duties.

Unlike the naming of an Acting Chair, which is transitory in nature and temporary by design, the appointments of Chair and Vice-Chair are intended to provide stable and long-lasting leadership to a committee for an extended and possibly indefinite period of time. Since the Vice-Chair is permanently and only tasked with the responsibility to preside over committee proceedings in the Chair's absence, it can be argued that the requirements and restrictions placed on the Chair also extend to the Vice-Chair in order to ensure that the permanent leadership is consistent with the intended function of the committee.

So while standing order 120(b) is silent on Vice-Chairs, the spirit of the provision logically asks this question: If the permanent Chair of those committees must fulfill certain requirements, how can someone permanently tasked to act as Chair be exempt? Put this another way: If the sole purpose of the Vice-Chair of estimates is to be ready to assume the duties of Chair as outlined in the committee's mandate, should the Chair be unavailable for whatever reason, does a government MPP in that role satisfy the intent of standing order 120(b) that the Standing Committee on Estimates be led by a recognized opposition party? Speaker, the answer is no.

As Wilding and Laundry point out in the fourth edition of *An Encyclopaedia of Parliament, parliamentary procedure* "is a combination of two elements, the traditional and the democratic." In keeping with our reliance on this mix of codified rules, unwritten practices and observed traditions, we should also look to the historic approach that the estimates committee has taken when it comes to installing Vice-Chairs.

Since the creation of the Standing Committee on Estimates in 1989, there has never been an instance where a government MPP has held the Vice-Chair role. In fact, the committee has never had a Vice-Chair from another party from the Chair prior to the February 24, 2021, motion passed by the government majority of the estimates committee.

While there are no universally accepted guidelines on what constitutes formally recognized practice, there is a strong case to be made for an approach that has served the House well for more than 30 years and has been utilized exclusively since the committee's inception. It can be argued that the universal, and only, interpretation of a standing order that has never been substantively amended or modified at any point during its history satisfies all unwritten requirements to formally constitute recognized practice.

Speaker, you understand better than most this blend of tradition and written rules, because you apply it every day in the Chair. We simply cannot throw out more than 30

years of understanding and application by successive Parliaments simply because the government of the day is tired of the rules as universally understood. No government, including this one, has ever questioned the interpretation or application of this standing order or has made any efforts to change it since it came into force in 1989.

Our traditions give governments the ability to permanently amend standing orders—and that's something that this government has done more frequently than any other government over the last 30 years—but they also require that governments take the necessary steps to make changes. What they do not do is give governments the power to reimagine and repurpose established practices without the express consent of the House.

In closing, Speaker, it is our position that the government's misinterpretation of standing order 120(b) is not only a violation of the intent of the provision but a flagrant disregard of the established practices of this House, and that this action potentially compromises the intended function of the Standing Committee on Estimates. It is our hope that you will uphold the 30-plus years of precedent and rule in favour of this point of privilege.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Are there any other members who wish to speak to the point of privilege?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I rise to respond to the point of privilege raised by the member from London West. The member has made serious claims that privileges of the House have been breached resulting from the election of the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook, a member of the Progressive Conservative caucus, to the position of Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee on Estimates.

1040

First, I assert that the member has failed to clearly identify any specific privilege of the House, or of any individual member, which has been breached. However, the member has made several arguments which I will respond individually.

While the alleged breach of privilege is specific to a Vice-Chair position, the basis of the member's claim is that explicit restrictions in standing order 120(b) for the allocation of Chairs flow inherently to the selection of Vice-Chairs by way of established practice. As such, I must first address the supposed intent of standing order 120(b) as characterized by the member opposite.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, standing order 120 provides for the distribution of committee Chairs "in proportion to the representation of the recognized parties in the House." The standing order further provides for exceptions to this general framework for specific committees: the Standing Committee on Estimates, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, and the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The member claims that the standing orders distinguish between multiple classes of committees: (1) those with restrictions on the Chair; (2) those without restrictions on the Chair; (3) oversight committees; and (4) non-oversight committees.

In her notice of this point of privilege, the member writes, "As you know, the standing orders place restrictions on the chairships of the standing committees on

finance, estimates and public accounts in keeping with the long-standing parliamentary tradition that ensures balance between a government's right to proceed with its agenda (finance) and the opposition's responsibility to hold the government to account (estimates, public accounts)." The member's argument is, however, flawed. If the intent of the restrictions on chairships was, as the member claims, to balance the obligations of the government and opposition parties, then surely the standing orders would include explicit restrictions for all committees making up the class of oversight committees.

As the member knows, the standing orders do not do this. They are silent on the chairship of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies, which must surely be seen as an oversight committee, in that its mandate and primary function is holding government to account. This has been acknowledged by the official opposition in a joint letter signed by the chairs of the standing committees on estimates, public accounts and government agencies dated June 16, 2020, grouping these three committees together as Legislative Assembly oversight committees and requesting that the House authorize them to meet following the temporary suspension of committee activities in the early months of the pandemic.

The member's argument regarding the intent of standing order 120(b) cannot be supported by the facts. If the intent of the House was to adopt a standing order for the purpose of balance and distinction between oversight committees and committees which facilitate the government's agenda, then it would have further restricted the chairship of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies, a committee which existed when the provisions of standing order 120(b) were implemented, to a member of an opposition party.

To determine the intent of clause (b), we must look at it in the context of the entire standing order: 120(a) sets out that the chairship of standing committees shall be distributed proportionately; 120(c) sets out the specific procedure for reconciling disagreements between parties on distribution. What the member has failed to recognize in standing order 120(b) is that a small but incredibly important distinction in language exists. While the Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts is to be a member of the official opposition, the Chair of the Standing Committee on Estimates is set out as a member of any recognized opposition party. The distinction is important in that clause (b) clearly, and only, furthers the intent of clause (a), ensuring minimum standards for proportional distribution of those positions.

It is my position that the intent of standing order 120(b) is to ensure that all recognized parties share the chairships of standing committees, while leaving room for scenarios where there are only two recognized parties. As noted by Bosc and Gagnon in chapter 20 of the third edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Chairs play an important representative role on behalf of their committees, like the Speaker on behalf of Parliament: "They are the committee's main spokesperson with ... parliamentarians, the media and civil society."

It follows that the proportional distribution of Chairs, supplemented by minimum standards which create the conditions necessary to ensure members of all recognized parties become Chairs, would be desirable for the House and for the non-partisan institution of Parliament as a whole. This, Mr. Speaker, is the actual intent of standing order 120(b).

The member opposite has failed to demonstrate that the intent of standing order 120 was anything more than ensuring the chairships of standing committees be shared between parties, a much easier interpretation of the intent of the standing order as written. The member opposite has simply not demonstrated that there is some inherent, unwritten, partisan requirement for certain Chairs to be selected from certain parties, as she claims.

Looking to the quote I read into the record earlier, the member has also made the argument that the chairship of oversight committees furthers the ability of the opposition to hold the government to account.

In addition, the member states the following in her notice of this point of privilege: “If the Vice-Chair maintains a standing responsibility to assume the duties of Chair as outlined in the committee’s mandate in the event of the temporary incapacity of the Chair for whatever reason, does a government MPP in that role satisfy the intent of standing order 120(b)? The answer is no.”

On this point, Mr. Speaker, I fundamentally disagree. It is an accepted convention of our system of Parliament, and our Legislature specifically, that the Chair of a committee or the Speaker shall be impartial.

Bosc and Gagnon noted in chapter 7 in the third edition of the House of Commons Procedure and Practice: “When in the Chair, the Speaker embodies the power and authority of the office, strengthened by rule and precedent. He or she must at all times show, and be seen to show, the impartiality required to sustain the trust and good will of the House.”

The principle further applies to committee Chairs as they execute their procedural, administrative and representative functions on behalf of their committees, and to members acting temporarily as the Chair in the Chair’s absence. Those presiding over committee must be impartial. As such, political affiliations should have no effect on the ability of a Chair or Vice-Chair to execute their responsibilities. In fact, in her arguments, the member has conflated the responsibilities of opposition parties and the responsibility of committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs.

I do not, in any way, dispute the opposition bears a fundamental obligation to hold the government to account—in fact, I have referenced it countless times in this place—but I do assert that those holding the office of committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs do not bear the same obligation by virtue of those positions. In their roles, on behalf of committee, they bear only the well-documented procedural, administrative and representative responsibilities flowed to them by the House.

There is a further key distinction between the Chair and Vice-Chair position, as Bosc and Gagnon noted also in chapter 20: “A Vice-Chair has no administrative or representative responsibility, such as convening or cancelling

meetings, unless he or she is acting on the instruction of the Chair.” And further: “Vice-Chairs cannot fulfill any responsibility or perform any other function while the office of Chair is vacant.”

Vice-Chairs share singularly in procedural responsibilities when the Chair is absent and share none of the representative responsibility. It is my position that this key distinction, combined with the fact that the standing orders create the positions as distinct roles, separately referenced, indicates a clear intent that the House wish to defer to individual committees for these selections, as was the standard with all committee Chair and Vice-Chair positions prior to 1986.

It is exceedingly clear that the member’s arguments that the explicit requirements of standing order 120(b), respecting Chairs, somehow flow inherently to the position of Vice-Chairs has not been proven.

The member seems to also argue that there is some sort of parliamentary convention or tradition to select the Chair and Vice-Chair from the same party, and that to not do so impedes the work of committee. We need only to look to the House of Commons, where the standard practice is that the Chairs and Vice-Chairs be selected from different parties. In fact, the standing order of the House of Commons specifically provide for this in standing order 106(2), which states: “At the commencement of every session and, if necessary, during the course of a session, each standing or special committee shall elect a Chair and two Vice-Chairs, of whom the Chair shall be a member of the government party, the first Vice-Chair shall be a member of the official opposition, and the second Vice-Chair shall be a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition party.” This practice has in no way disrupted or impeded the work of any of the nearly 30 standing committees of the House of Commons, and to argue that a similar arrangement for standing committees of this House would somehow impede the proper functioning cannot be supported by the facts. There is simply no basis for the member’s arguments related to the standing orders, parliamentary convention or tradition, or the ability of committees to conduct business.

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Further, Mr. Speaker, I must raise the issue of timeliness, which is a fundamental requirement when raising a point of privilege. On August 24, 2020, the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight elected the member for Humber River–Black Creek as its Vice-Chair. On October 14, 2020, the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills elected the member for Ottawa South as its Vice-Chair. On October 20, 2020, the Standing Committee on General Government elected the member for Guelph as its Vice-Chair.

On February 18, 2021, the Standing Committee on Justice Policy elected the member for Ottawa–Vanier as its Vice-Chair. On February 18, the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs elected the member for Kingston and the Islands as its Vice-Chair, although he then resigned after only a few minutes of service. On February 23, 2021, the Standing Committee on Government Agencies elected the member for Scarborough–

Agincourt as its Vice-Chair. Finally, on February 24, 2021, the Standing Committee on Estimates elected the member for Flamborough–Glanbrook as its Vice-Chair.

In each of these instances, a Vice-Chair was elected from a party differing from the party holding the Chair, but today is March 1 and we are only now hearing of the point of privilege from the member opposite. I would assert that this delayed point of privilege has not been made in a timely fashion.

Further, Mr. Speaker, when these elections occurred on August 24, October 14, October 20, February 18, February 23 and February 24, none of the member opposite or any of her colleagues from the official opposition raised any concerns with a potential breach of the privileges of this House. If you review the relevant committee transcripts, you will find that not a single concern was raised, except by the member for Kingston and the Islands, who did not feel he could effectively hold the government to account by serving as the committee's Vice-Chair.

Mr. Speaker, this is an argument which has been referenced by the member opposite in her notice of the point of privilege and which is entirely contradictory to her other points. On one hand, she claims that the official opposition must hold the Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee on Estimates in order to hold the government to account. On the other hand, she argues holding the Vice-Chair would have limited the member for Kingston and the Islands' ability to hold the government to account.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I believe that parliamentary convention and precedential rulings of Speakers of this House and of the House of Commons leave with you no choice but to find that this point of privilege has not followed the necessary process. As Bosc and Gagnon noted in chapter 3, "Speakers have consistently ruled that, except in the most extreme situations, they will hear questions of privilege arising from committee proceedings only upon presentation of a report from the committee which deals directly with the matter and not as a question of privilege raised by an individual member."

To support this point, I reference Speaker Levac in his decision of March 25, 2014, respecting an allegation of the improper disclosure of committee documents. In that ruling, it says, "This power" to reconcile the conflicting arguments presented "rests with the Standing Committee on Estimates, which ... is best able to decide if the allegation of improper disclosure is correct, and it can bring this matter properly before the House by adopting and presenting a report, if it chooses to do so."

In 2003, Speaker Milliken ruled in a similar case: "In the absence of a report from the committee on such an issue, it is virtually impossible for the Chair to make any judgment as to the prima facie occurrence of a breach of privilege with regard to such charges."

Most recently, Mr. Speaker, on July 14, 2020, you ruled on a point of order which I raised regarding the disclosure of confidential information from an in camera meeting of a standing committee as follows: "While disclosing information regarding an in camera meeting of a standing committee would be inappropriate and could be a valid

point of order, the Speaker has no way of knowing what transpires in each standing committee, especially during their in camera sessions. This issue would therefore properly be raised in and considered by the committee."

Mr. Speaker, I submit that the member from London West has failed to make any reasonable case for prima facie breach of privilege. She has failed to show any specific privilege that has been breached. She has failed to prove that the standing orders or any parliamentary convention explicitly or implicitly prohibit the election of Vice-Chairs who are the members of parties differing from the party to which the Chair belongs. She has failed to prove that the ability of committees to conduct business would be in any way impeded by this practice. She has failed to prove any rational connection between the partisan affiliation of a committee Chair or Vice-Chair and the member's ability to execute those non-partisan, impartial offices. Finally, she has failed to show that even if a breach of privilege could be proven, the government is in any way responsible for it.

Over the course of six months, seven separate committees of this House have elected members to Vice-Chair positions on committees where members of the opposing parties held the Chair. Each of these times, the Chair of those committees, in consultation with the Clerks, found the motions nominating those members to be in order. In two cases, the Chairs were members of the official opposition, one of whom was a former NDP House leader who has 30 years of elected experience and 10 years in a heavily procedural role.

The member for London West claims that the government is acting in hostile way, aggressively using its majority to unilaterally install bipartisan committee leadership. I'll read that again: aggressively using its majority to unilaterally install bipartisan committee leadership. I will end by saying that on this side of the House, we will always see aggressive bipartisanship as a good thing, and we will always work to enhance the engagement of members on both sides of the aisle.

Mr. Speaker, this is simply not a situation where the rule in question is vague or unclear as to its scope or application, which might logically invite a Speaker to opine on its exact meaning. In fact, the standing order in question is very clear on its face and should be interpreted in the manner in which it was clearly intended.

Finally, thank you for hearing my response in this matter. Of course, any legitimate breach of privilege of this House must be considered seriously, but now, having heard these arguments, I urge you to dispense with this unfounded point of privilege and allow this House to return to its important business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Are there any other members who wish to offer their opinions on this matter?

I want to thank the member for London West for her presentation, as well as the government House leader for his response. I will deliberate and inform the House of my ruling in due course.

QUESTION PERIOD

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question this morning is for the Premier. On March 30, the Premier said this: “We’re putting an iron ring of protection around our seniors.”

The testimony of the Minister of Long-Term Care at the long-term-care commission was made public, and it’s very clear in that testimony that she knew very well that there was no such thing, no iron ring at all around long-term care. So why was the Premier telling seniors and their families that the government had put an iron ring of protection around seniors in long-term care when, in fact, his minister was telling him that that was not the truth?

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

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I simply want to start by clarifying, and want to make sure words are not being put in my mouth. So I would ask anyone who wants to find out what was said to read the testimony.

I had the opportunity to meet with the commission and answer their questions, and I’m confident the testimony they have heard will serve as a solid foundation to build their final report and recommendations. Our government is looking forward to receiving those at the end of April as we work to modernize long-term care.

It’s no secret that the sector entered this pandemic having been neglected by previous governments for many years. The former Liberal government never got four hours of daily direct care done for long-term care. The former Liberal government built only 611 beds, leaving our seniors vulnerable, and the NDP propped them up every step of the way.

That, Mr. Speaker, was the state of long-term care entering into this pandemic. We did everything we could. The NDP and Liberals voted against key stabilization investments and measures. If they had their way, homes in their constituencies would not have received hundreds of thousands of dollars.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It’s really clear from the minister’s testimony that she was flagging some concerns that the government then took weeks and sometimes months to act upon; things like, for example, how the virus was spreading, things like that long-term care had literally been forgotten when it comes to the distribution of PPE, things like warning that the army needed to be called into Orchard Villa as people were dying by the dozens. In fact, she mentioned that, I think, on April 17, and yet it took until the 28th before the army was even called in.

Speaker, why was the Premier telling the people of Ontario that there was an iron ring around long-term care when, clearly, his minister was telling him that that wasn’t true?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you again to the member opposite. I had been following what was going on around the world, and these were largely anecdotal cases at that point. There was a paucity of research, a paucity of evidence, and there hadn’t been any real large-scale studies into it then. Dr. Williams would have been in tune to the latest science and research and had more inputs available to him from a public health standpoint than we did at the cabinet table. I want to emphasize the importance of the whole cabinet and the whole government taking the advice of the science and public health experts at that time.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, back to the Premier: Experts and front-line staff in long-term care were warning about the asymptomatic spread of COVID-19. They were warning about the movement of workers between homes. They were talking about the critical lack of PPE in long-term care. The minister, apparently, behind the scenes was echoing these very sentiments.

So if that was the case, as was indicated by her testimony at the commission, why was the Premier of our province telling seniors and family members that he had put an iron ring around long-term care when obviously she was telling him it wasn’t the truth?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Again, I wish to clarify for the record that the mischaracterization of any statements I’ve made is not appreciated.

I have been following what was going on around the world throughout the pandemic. We relied on leading scientific and public health voices. This was consistent, and this was made very clear by the Premier—absolutely. This was something we were doing, and we continue to do to this day.

Our government did everything we could to shore up the sector, investing \$1.38 billion to date. These investments provided critical supports to purchase things like PPE, hire more staff or modernize HVAC systems. This was an ongoing effort. We did everything we could. We moved as fast as we could. We took the advice of the experts, the scientists and our public health experts the whole way along.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my next question’s actually for the Minister of Long-Term Care. It’s really clear from the minister’s testimony at the commission that she had concerns about the protection of seniors in long-term care. Throughout March and April of last year, and in fact many months subsequently, the Premier kept claiming that there was an iron ring of protection around long-term care. Why didn’t this minister, then, go public and speak up and save lives in long-term care?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: I think it’s important to note, back in the day, taking you back to that time, very little research was done, very little evidence—global competition for PPE, global competition for test kits and reagents.

The whole world was learning about the evidence surrounding this virus. And we were taking the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, of our public health experts. I give all of those people credit because, again, we were learning and trying to learn very, very rapidly, taking the advice of the experts, the public health authorities the whole way through and understanding what measures we could put in place to protect our most vulnerable. They had the landscape of understanding, and they were in their role. I had my ministry to advocate for our most vulnerable, which I absolutely did, knowing that we needed to have an ongoing effort to put more and more measures in place, which we continue to do today.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The minister was clearly disagreeing with the Chief Medical Officer of Health and the Premier about how the disease spreads and about the need for PPE in long-term care. Meanwhile, we watched as homes like Orchard Villa racked up tragedy after tragedy after tragedy while seniors were dying, Speaker.

The Premier kept claiming that there was an iron ring of protection around long-term care. Why did this minister, knowing what she knew, continue to back up the Premier's claims?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Once again, I understand what the member opposite is attempting to do here. I want to say how important it was for our cabinet, this whole way along, to be understanding the science as it evolved, listening to the public health experts, listening to the scientists and understanding what we could do in the context of what was known about COVID-19, during a pandemic that hadn't occurred like this in a hundred years.

I give credit to everyone who has been working around the clock to understand this virus this whole time, whether it was getting the PPE we needed—many people worked on that—getting the testing done or making sure that we could have the science behind the vaccines and the rapid tests. All of this was ongoing to make sure that we used every measure, every tool in the tool box we possibly could, listening to the science, listening to the experts and addressing a novel virus.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the minister knew that seniors were not safe. The minister knew that protections were not in place to keep them safe. We all watched as the tragedies continued to occur in places like Orchard Villa. The people of Ontario saw the horrifying evidence in the Armed Forces report that came out of their help there.

It is unbelievable that these unspeakable tragedies continued to occur while the Premier claimed there was an iron ring of protection around long-term care. Why did this minister say nothing? Why did she not take the veil off of that comment, off of that assertion that the Premier kept making when she knew that it was not true?

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Withdraw, Speaker.

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

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Again, I find it offensive the way this is being mischaracterized. I will say adamantly that this whole side of the House has consistently said about the importance of following the experts, the importance of following the science—which is exactly what we did.

Again, my background as a family doctor perhaps made me slightly different than the average politician, but again, I was not the public health expert. I was not the scientific expert. I was in my role as the Minister of Long-Term Care, advocating for the ministry and making sure that we used and advocated for every measure possible, which is exactly what was done. Certainly the expert opinion and the expert advice from the scientists involved is very much appreciated, and we will continue to follow that advice.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Sara Singh: My question is to the Premier. Last week, the government dumped hundreds of thousands of documents and thousands of pages of notes on the long-term-care commission. The Deputy Premier and health minister told the commission she didn't fully know how this government made certain decisions—for example, such as opening up asymptomatic testing to all Ontarians. She told the commission that this was something “that was very important to the Premier” and that “you would really need to speak to him about that.”

Speaker, if the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health believes the Premier should be the one providing the answers to Ontarians, why won't the Premier appear before the long-term-care commission?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond on behalf of the government, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: As we've seen, the commission has been doing a tremendous amount of work. I remind the members of the opposition that this was a commission that they didn't want. In fact, they fought tirelessly against it.

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I'm gratified to know that they are continuing to do the hard work. Both the Minister of Long-Term Care and the Minister of Health have appeared before it. Dr. Williams has appeared before it. We're anxiously awaiting additional recommendations coming from that so that we can act, as we have done on the first two sets of recommendations.

There's a lot of work to do in long-term care. This will help us facilitate that work—work that we started from day one after we were elected.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: The commission is supposed to be getting to the bottom of the disasters in long-term care in order to save lives and ensure that this never happens again. As we saw in the second wave, where even more families lost their loved ones due to COVID-19 in the long-term-care system, this government did not build the iron ring that they continue to promise.

The Minister of Health doesn't even know why this government made decisions about this pandemic and what to do about it. She believes, and she told the commission in her testimony, that the Premier is the one with the answers.

Does the Premier intend to appear before the commission so that Ontarians who lost their loved ones will get the answers and closure that they deserve?

Hon. Paul Calandra: In fact, this government took action immediately. We knew that we were inheriting a system that was woefully underfunded when we took office in 2018. It was unprepared to deal with the challenges of the day, let alone the challenges of a pandemic. That's why we moved very quickly to make some serious investments into long-term care, to build new beds and to add capacity to the system. The Minister of Health brought forward a new Ontario health team to allow for a blanket of care. We saw some of that in action when hospitals in my riding assumed responsibility for some of the long-term-care homes that were having challenges. Infection prevention and control measures were brought into place.

The commission is helping us address some of the issues that we found in a pandemic so that if this ever happens again, we are prepared better than we were when we inherited this government in 2018. We will spare no expense to make sure our seniors get the care and services that they need, and we look forward to the commission's final recommendations so that they can be added to the things that have already been started by both the Minister of Long-Term Care and the Minister of Health.

RURAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Stan Cho: My question is for the Minister of Health. We all know that rural hospitals play a critical role in providing high-quality health care for Ontarians close to home. We also know that these hospitals have been left behind under the previous government. Can the minister please update this House on the latest measures our government is taking to end hallway health care and support our rural hospitals?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much to the member from Willowdale for this very important question. Rural hospitals play a critical role in ensuring equitable access to high-quality care for patients and families all over Ontario. That's why we're investing up to \$53 million to support the development and construction of the new Grey Bruce Health Services Markdale Hospital as part of our plan to end hallway health care. This new hospital is part of our investment of \$20 billion over 10 years to build new and expanded health care infrastructure. This will ensure that the people of Markdale and the surrounding area have access to modern facilities and high-quality services close to home when they need them.

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

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you, Minister, for that response and for all of the hard work that she is doing to lead the way in ending hallway health care here in Ontario. Speaker, through you, can the minister please tell this

House specifically why this investment is critical to Grey Bruce Health Services?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bill Walker: I was pleased to attend the virtual announcement with the Premier and the Minister of Health on this new critical health care infrastructure, and I'm still smiling.

Construction begins this week. Once complete, the new Markdale Hospital will provide more services in a modern and spacious environment for patients and families in Markdale and neighbouring regions, including:

- a 24/7 emergency department with four exam and treatment areas that will provide improved space for staff and patients;

- four short-stay beds better adapted to new non-surgical procedures, and one palliative care bed;

- a bigger space to double outpatient care and expanded procedural services, including minor procedures;

- access to a clinical laboratory and state-of-the-art diagnostic imaging services, ambulatory clinics, space for visiting specialists and interprofessional teams, and expanded telemedicine services; and

- an ambulance bay for two ambulances.

The president and CEO of Grey Bruce Health Services, Gary Sims, said, "This is the news we have been waiting for, and we are extremely pleased to begin construction of a brand new, state-of-the-art hospital in Markdale. This announcement solidifies the future of excellent health care in" Grey Centre. The mayor of Grey Highlands, Paul McQueen, said, "I couldn't be happier."

I echo those. Health care in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound is the best that it can be.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. During the debate on the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act last week, the member for Burlington stated that paid sick days do not work to control the spread of COVID-19, which probably explains the Premier's initial opposition to the inadequate and temporary federal program which he now claims to champion.

Speaker, a research study from the United States, where employers were required to provide two weeks of paid sick days between March and December last year, showed that the measure prevented an average of 400 cases per day, per state.

With the real threat of a third wave upon us, why does this government not think that preventing 400 COVID cases per day in Ontario is something worth doing?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I would like to actually begin by congratulating former Premier Bill Davis. Mr. Davis was sworn in as Ontario's 18th Premier 50 years ago today. On behalf of the government of Ontario, I want to congratulate Premier Davis on a legacy that he's left of a province.

Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the members opposite that the very first action our government took was to bring in job-protected leave. If any worker is in self-isolation, in quarantine, if you're a mom or dad who has to stay home and look after your loved one, a child, you can't be fired for that. Furthermore, we eliminated the need for sick notes during COVID-19.

I'm proud of the Premier of this province joining with all provincial and territorial leaders in signing a \$1.1-billion agreement with the federal government to bring in paid sick days for all workers in Ontario.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Unpaid leave does not work for workers who live paycheque to paycheque.

The Premier has been trying to rewrite history on his support for paid sick days, so long as they are provided by the federal government. But public health officials, mayors, municipal councils, boards of health and small business owners all understand that forcing workers to take unpaid leave and then apply to the federal program, risking their own financial security and that of their families, will not help curb workplace transmission, regardless of the changes that are made to the CRSB. That is why they are calling for changes to provincial employment standards legislation so that workers can actually stay home to get a COVID test and wait for results.

Will the Premier listen to these calls and direct his caucus to support my bill today?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Furthermore, the Premier of this province, as I said in my first answer, negotiated \$1.1 billion worth of paid sick days for workers in Ontario and across the country. Over 110,000 workers have now applied for that benefit or are receiving that benefit. There is still \$800 million left in the bank. We're not going to duplicate that program. In fact, we're advocating on behalf of workers to improve that program.

I'm proud to say, because of Ontario's advocacy, payments are getting into workers' bank accounts, directly deposited, within three to five days. Workers can now apply more than once. And there are now four weeks of paid sick days for workers in the province of Ontario, something you, ma'am, should applaud.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll remind the members to make their comments through the Chair, not directly across the floor.

The next question.

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Mike Schreiner: My question is for the Premier. Opposition to Highway 413 is growing every single day, with Mississauga city council being the latest to pass a resolution against it. People do not want to see 2,000 acres of prime farmland and 400 acres of the greenbelt paved over so that commuters can save only 30 seconds. They don't want to supercharge 1950s-style sprawl at a time when we need farmland to grow food and jobs, and we need green space to protect us from flooding. People want

affordable public transit, not more expensive congestion and highways.

Speaker, will the Premier commit to protecting prime farmland and say no to Highway 413?

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

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Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question from the honourable member. As I said last week, there's still a tremendous amount of work that needs to be done here: some consultations that of course have to happen with our partners in the area, an environmental assessment.

Of course, the greenbelt legislation always did make allowances for critical infrastructure. Having said that, once we accomplish all these consultations, if it makes sense for the highway to proceed, it will; if it doesn't, we won't.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I think it is clear the government has not done its homework on this highway, from the answer we received today and from the opposition that is growing across this province. Even people who supported the highway in the past are now passing resolutions asking the government not to fast-track the environmental assessment process. Some are even calling on the federal government to step in and have a federal EA. Just four years ago, experts said this highway costs far more than the benefits it provides.

Speaker, it's clear: Highway 14 is fiscally irresponsible, it threatens our food and farming economy, and it will increase flood risks. So, Speaker, I'm asking the government to get its priorities right, conduct the proper studies and shelve Highway 413.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I do appreciate what the honourable gentleman is saying and I do obviously appreciate his passion. I think we share a passion for farmland and how important it is to the economy of the province of Ontario. That is why we will continue to work closely with our partners in the area.

It is an area that has seen rapid expansion and population growth. In addition to transit and transportation options, we are obliged to look at everything. But this has to go through an environmental assessment, additional consultations. If it makes sense to proceed with it, we will. But if it doesn't make sense for the people of the province of Ontario and the people in the area, then we will not proceed with it.

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Stan Cho: My question is to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. The greenbelt is an important part of our province. It includes over two million acres of land, offering several environmental benefits like helping to protect our farmland, forests, wetlands and watersheds. The greenbelt also provides resilience to extreme weather events by protecting important natural systems and features, such as the Oak Ridges moraine and the Niagara Escarpment.

Mr. Speaker, I've spoken with constituents in Willowdale who are very concerned about the impacts of climate change in their local communities. They want to know that they can trust their government to ensure that Ontario's natural spaces, including the greenbelt, remain protected and preserved for future generations to enjoy. So, Speaker, my question is simple: Can the minister please commit to us today that he will protect and support the improvement of the greenbelt?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: I want to thank the member for Willowdale for that question and inquiry. Mr. Speaker, in our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan, we made a commitment to protect and recover our natural spaces. I want to congratulate the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on his great work in doing his part to grow the greenbelt.

My ministry is investing \$12 million over three years to support the Greenbelt Foundation's ongoing work to protect, promote and improve the greenbelt in the province's Golden Horseshoe region. Some of the priority projects this funding will support include native tree, shrub and other vegetation plantings to increase natural cover; enhancing opportunities for people to experience the greenbelt; and maintaining and enhancing green infrastructure and climate resilience.

Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to preserving and protecting our natural environment, and we continue to support the stewardship of the greenbelt now and for future generations.

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

Mr. Stan Cho: While the greenbelt has an important environmental role to play in this province, it also contributes significantly to Ontario's social and economic well-being. It provides great support to local communities, providing them with food to eat and clean water to drink.

Speaker, I know the members opposite like to rewrite history when it comes to environmental protections, but the reality is, the Liberals, backed by the NDP, openly admitted and even tried to justify carving into this significant landscape at least 17 different times over the last decade.

I know that the Greenbelt Foundation has been an important partner in the government's efforts to restore the environmental and agricultural integrity of the greenbelt area, so can the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks please expand on how the Greenbelt Foundation investment will be used to help protect and restore the greenbelt?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks again to the member for Willowdale for that question. The greenbelt is a vitally important part of our province. It provides ecological, social and economic benefits for everyone. Our government is proud to support the ongoing work of the Greenbelt Foundation to look after this key area.

Some of the great past work of the Greenbelt Foundation has been making improvements to environmental farm practices, supporting a viable agricultural and

viticultural sector, and promoting vibrant rural communities. Our government's continued partnership with this organization will help support research and enhance information, knowledge and awareness of the greenbelt.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to continue to help Ontarians recover from the impacts of COVID-19. This investment is building on the government's work to support both a healthy environment and a healthy economy, a concept that we keep proving over and over again on this side of the House.

CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: My question is to the Premier. Appalling working conditions for Black, Indigenous and racialized staff at the Toronto South Detention Centre have forced officers to file human rights complaints about racism and discrimination. The complaints show that racialized staff were routinely subject to abuse and racism from their managers.

One manager faced allegations of racism and had a history of excessive force before being put in charge of projects overseeing Black inmates. When racialized staff complained, they were punished for speaking out. The well-being of racialized staff and racialized people who are disproportionately incarcerated has been ignored at every turn.

Speaker, through you to the Premier: The ministry should have known what was happening. So why has this government failed to address systemic racism at Toronto South Detention Centre?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Solicitor General.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I think we were all disturbed when we heard the allegations, but I must reinforce: In fact, they are allegations. An active investigation is happening, and I don't want to presuppose the outcome. The importance of having investigations happen without overdue political interference is a very important part of our judicial system, and I would hope that the member opposite would appreciate and understand that.

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

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Back to the Premier: These conditions don't just happen at Toronto South. To be honest, we've got report after report saying that systemic racism is running rampant in our justice system.

Staff have called the working conditions at the detention centre toxic. They have said that they don't feel safe going into work anymore, because "racialized personnel bear the brunt of the rather sick work environment." They have called for systemic change to address racism within the correctional system.

Nobody deserves this treatment. No one should ever have to deal with conditions like this, not while they're at work, not while they're incarcerated, not anywhere in Ontario. Speaker, through you to the Premier, what will the government commit to do today to address the

horrifying examples of systemic racism at the Toronto South Detention Centre?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Again, Speaker, I say: Let the investigation proceed. Let's find out what the allegations are and if there is any factual evidence to it. Instead, the member opposite has actually expanded and said it's everywhere. Please allow the investigators to do their job so that we can find out what the issue is, if there is an issue, and solve it.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is to the Premier. We've heard from the Premier, his own insistence, that he will do whatever it takes for long-term-care residents and to put an iron ring around these homes to protect them from COVID-19. However, what has come to light from the long-term-care commission is that this government's strategy has been a complete failure. They have been slow to respond to the facts, and this has put the elderly at risk, as well as our front-line care workers.

Two ministers admitted to the commission that the Premier ignored their advice and their conscience. Once the threat of asymptomatic spread was an accepted fact, the government did nothing to protect long-term-care residents from a second wave, even though the minister herself said she wrote to the Chief Medical Officer on April 2 about staff transmission of the virus. I, too, wrote to the Premier and the Chief Medical Officer about the risk five days prior, on March 27.

Speaker, what is the government doing to prepare long-term-care homes for the third wave? Can the government confirm that all front-line care workers have been vaccinated, and if not, when will this be done?

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

1130

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: I appreciate the concerns of the member opposite. The fact is that our government moved quickly. COVID is very fast and we were ahead of the processes, understanding what could be done for long-term care, the whole way through, and we will continue to do that. Unfortunately, COVID has hit long-term-care homes not only in Ontario but across Canada and around the world.

We're using every option at our disposal to prevent and contain the spread of the virus. We implemented surveillance testing of residents and staff. This slowed outbreaks by catching new cases early. We lowered the threshold of the definition of "outbreak" so that we could get public health experts into the homes rapidly. We've initiated the rapid tests; 1.5 million rapid tests have been shipped to over 550 long-term-care homes. We continue to add layers of defence.

The vaccinations have rolled out across Ontario. All long-term-care homes have had outreach for residents to receive vaccines, and we continue to loop back to see if

anyone further is wanting a vaccine or has changed their mind, and it's made available to staff—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. And the supplementary?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, the fact is that this government is not doing everything in its power. When you look at Quebec's experience, they hired—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: —and trained orderlies in the summer of 2020. You have yet to do that, to hire the required PSWs that are needed in these homes—

Interjections.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: —so that the staffing levels are at complementary levels; and this, despite the fact that you have resources. You are sitting on \$4 billion in standard contingency funds that could be used right now to invest in our long-term care, to invest in front-line workers to make sure that public health units are well resourced to do the work that you are asking them to do.

Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: —back to the minister: Will you do the right thing and use the contingency funds to provide paid sick leave so that workers in Ontario, including our front line health care workers, have the option to stay home when they are sick, instead of having to go to work? Will you do that: yes or no?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Stop the clock. I repeatedly asked the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks and the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development to come to order. I couldn't hear the member for Scarborough-Guildwood with her question so I had to give her a little extra time so she could place her question.

Start the clock. The Minister of Labour to reply.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I remind the member opposite that the first action that our government took was to bring in job-protected leave for any worker in Ontario. If they are impacted by COVID-19, if they're in self-isolation, in quarantine, or if they are at home looking after a son or daughter because of disruptions to schools, they can't be fired for that. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we were the very first jurisdiction in North America to bring forward action to protect workers. We went further: We eliminated the need for sick notes in Ontario.

But, Mr. Speaker, there is now four weeks of paid sick days for workers in this province; 110,000 workers have either applied or are receiving this benefit. We continue to advocate on behalf of workers in this province. I look forward to the federal-provincial-territorial call this afternoon to continue advocating on behalf of workers to improve the federal program for paid sick days.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Stan Cho: My question is for the Minister of Colleges and Universities. Students at colleges and universities across the province have had their mental health negatively impacted by COVID-19. For many of them, this pandemic has limited their ability to socialize and explore opportunities available to most post-secondary students, things that can provide purpose, like extra-curricular activities, volunteering in our community and playing sports. In addition, courses have had to move online and many students have had a difficult time with that transition.

Even though the majority of students are not on campus, the government has the responsibility to make sure that our students are getting the support they need to succeed while attending college or university.

Speaker, through you: Can the minister please tell us what the government is doing to support mental health services on campuses and for students?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant and member for Northumberland–Peterborough South.

Mr. David Piccini: The member is quite right that COVID-19 has been a challenging time for many students alike across the province of Ontario. That's why we launched over 50 sector-specific consultations when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. We've been working closely with student groups to support them during these trying times.

I would like to highlight a recent investment of over \$695,000 into Peterborough–Kawartha. I joined the Minister of Infrastructure and the member of Parliament for Peterborough–Kawartha to announce over \$695,000 to support mental health funding at Trent and Fleming. The funding at Fleming is going to go towards increased access to mental health practitioners—such as psychological and additional support for counsellors. At Trent University, this funding will be directed towards crisis counselling, mental health planning, additional FPHL counselling, international counselling, direct counselling, peer-to-peer support etc. I was touched to receive a message from one of the students, who acknowledged the important investments that this will make to support in shared and lived experiences.

Mr. Speaker, the government will always stand to support students during these trying times.

I thank the member for that question.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Stan Cho: We know that before COVID-19 students on college and university campuses were increasingly facing mental health challenges. According to the last National College Health Assessment survey of the Canadian student population from 2019, 52% of students reported feeling depressed compared to 46% in 2016; 69% experienced anxiety; 12% of Canada's students had considered suicide compared to 14% in 2016; and 2.8% of students reported having, sadly, attempted suicide. Those statistics are alarming and must change.

Speaker, through you to the member: What is the government doing to address these concerns across Ontario's post-secondary campuses?

Mr. David Piccini: I'd again like to thank the member for Willowdale for this important question, and for always being a champion for students facing trying times through COVID-19 in his own riding and across the province of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, we're going to continue working with our post-secondary institutions and, importantly, with our student groups—not just here in Ontario, but we work across our country to work through important mechanisms like the Council of Ministers of Education, to work with other provinces to ensure that we're always responding to the ever-changing needs of students during these trying times.

In fact, this government is making an historic investment this year of over \$26.25 million in mental health supports for post-secondary students. This is an increase of over \$10.5 million alone over last year's funding. These additional funds will be important in our ongoing efforts to support students: things like mental health grants for our publicly assisted colleges and universities; the Good2Talk/Allo j'écoute mental health helpline, new investments to support innovative partnerships; new virtual mental health supports—and I could go on.

Again, I would like to thank the member—

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

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Premier. With the Legislature now back in session, we're getting a better taste of the Premier's priorities. For those keeping track at home, paid sick days are not on the list. A permanent raise for front-line health care staff like PSWs, both in home care and long-term care? Maybe later. Safer schools and workplaces? "Well, we're working on it. We're thinking about it."

But we were all surprised last week when one of the Premier's priority items was introducing legislation to put more publicly funded dollars into the PC Party coffers. In what alternative universe is that a priority for anyone in a pandemic, when thousands of people have died? What priority is that for anyone?

Interjections.

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

The government House leader to respond.

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member will know that changes to the Election Act need to be introduced in this Legislature well in advance of an election so that the Chief Electoral Officer can ensure that those take place.

The member, of course, seems to be against adding advance polling days; we support those. We think more people should have the opportunity to vote earlier. We've seen that that's an advantage.

There are other modifications that have been introduced that make sense, and I am quite confident that as the members review the legislation, they will be very supportive of it.

As the member obviously knows, time needs to be given so that the Chief Electoral Officer can ensure that the changes can take place before the next election.

1140

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

Mr. John Vanthof: I commend the government House leader on his answer. He's an expert at the bob and weave. But the issue is that what people are looking for, what we were expecting last week and hoping for, was a bill to support small business.

I spoke to the West Nipissing Chamber of Commerce last weekend and they were looking for more help for small business. So were we. What no one was looking for was a bill to increase public funding to the PC Party—no one. If that is the government's priority, the Premier's priority, we have bigger problems than we thought. Why is increasing funding to the PC Party a government priority right now?

Hon. Paul Calandra: First and foremost, let me just suggest to the gentleman opposite and all members of this Legislature that some of the items that the member has referenced—I have reached out to two of them and asked them if they would be supportive of those measures if they came forward, and they are in this bill. And now, of course, when the mikes are on, they are against them.

When this member talks about the things that we have done, the Minister of Long-Term Care has put more money and more access into long-term-care beds than that party ever did; the Minister of Health, more money into health care funding; the Minister of Transportation, more money for roads and highways; the Minister of Finance, more money to support our small businesses in a pandemic. We have cut taxes. We have improved the environment. We have done better on education.

By every measure, the people of the province of Ontario are better today than they were in 2018 when we took over. The only thing the opposition have to offer is simply always talking down the people of the province of Ontario. We'll lift the people of the province of Ontario along with us, because this is a great province that deserves better than that.

SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

M^{me} Lucille Collard: My question is for the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. I'm quite sure that members in this House have been hearing from people on the Ontario Disability Support Program, as I have been hearing. During a coffee talk with residents on ODSP in my riding, they explained to me how difficult it has been to live decently on the allocation they get, which, of course, has been made worse with COVID.

I learned that the program has not been following the rising cost of living for almost three decades, so people already disadvantaged by their conditions, through no fault of their own, are left unable to cover costs we take for granted, like transportation, education, healthy food and often even a basic telephone line that for someone with health conditions can mean the difference between life and death.

My question to the minister: Is the minister willing to commit to doing more financially for people with disabilities so they can live with dignity and put food on the table?

Hon. Todd Smith: Well, thanks very much to the member opposite for the question. I do realize that the member opposite has only been a member of that party for a short time, but they were the government of Ontario for 15 years, and those same people that she's advocating for now—and I fully understand why she would be advocating for them. They are finding it difficult.

I can tell you that since we've been government of Ontario, we've increased rates by 1.5%, and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services is on track to increasing spending by more than a half a billion dollars, \$614 million, compared to last year, as we continue to respond to the challenges presented by COVID-19. These same individuals, I know, are feeling the effects of that. That's why we brought in emergency benefits early in the pandemic. That's why we continue to offer discretionary benefits. And that's why we have also brought in social services relief fund. Over half a billion dollars has been invested in that SSRF to help people across the province who are finding themselves in tough times and are struggling during COVID-19.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Obviously, a lot more needs to be done. I also learned of a common issue during my discussion, and it's about getting clarity about what is covered by the program. A program meant to support people with disabilities and health conditions is leaving them jumping through hoops to access vital services, therapies, devices and information. Currently, it seems that workers who are administering the programs and administering the demands from the beneficiaries are using discretion to interpret what is an admissible expense.

The request that is made is simple: Is the minister willing to ensure that a comprehensive and accessible guide on funding opportunities, services and coverage be made available to help those with disabilities navigate this program?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks again to the member opposite for the question. It's a very thoughtful one, and I appreciate the fact that she has brought it forward here today.

I can tell you that we are working daily to improve the system of the Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works, Mr. Speaker. At the same time, we're responding to COVID-19. We know that there are specific challenges with COVID-19, but we also know there are

improvements that need to be made to the system. That's why we brought forward a five-year poverty reduction strategy, and that's why we're continuing to revamp the system to ensure that it's working better for those who need that safety net, Mr. Speaker.

I implore the member opposite to continue to bring these questions forward and to work with my ministry as we continue to change the way we deliver the social assistance network of programs that are available. There are many, many of them out there, from the devices that the individual mentions, to the financial support that's available to them every month.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. A K-W company, Canadian Shield, were forced to lay off 47 people this weekend because they can't get their PPE masks and shields into the health care industry. They have five million masks and two million face shields sitting on a shelf. I hope we can all acknowledge that no company, especially one that stepped up when Ontario was caught off-guard without sufficient PPE, should have to lay off employees during an ongoing pandemic. Ontario needs this quality and competitively priced PPE, and we need the jobs.

The Premier will remember this company; he toured and he praised them for doing the right thing, and many photos were taken. In fact, the Premier even packed a box of PPE, but that box is unfortunately still sitting on a shelf, not keeping doctors, nurses or essential workers safe.

This is an industrywide issue for PPE manufacturers across Ontario and will impact our success in the fight against COVID-19. Will the Premier adapt the Supply Ontario procurement model, at the very least for PPE, during this emerging health care crisis?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm glad the member referenced how much work has been done in the province of Ontario in contrast to the beginning of the pandemic, when many of our sources of PPE were required to be secured offshore. We have done a tremendous amount of work, and Ontario companies have certainly stepped up. As you know, we are rebuilding a system that had been allowed to languish and, really, disappear in the province of Ontario.

The company that she mentions and a whole host of others, including some in my riding, have stepped up in doing what they can to ensure that Ontario hospitals, businesses and long-term care have access to good-quality, made-in-Ontario PPE. At the same time, the Minister of Government and Consumer Services has been working very, very hard—and very quickly, frankly—to ensure that those Canadian companies, those Ontario-made success stories, have access to procurement through the province of Ontario in ways that they never have before. Obviously, we're going to continue to improve on the system so that more Ontario companies can provide the very important PPE right here, made in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Ms. Catherine Fife: But they don't. That's the point of my question. If we are to ensure that Ontario has a sustainable, homegrown PPE industry, then we must get procurement right. The Ontario health minister admitted as much in testimony with the long-term-care commission. She said, "I was not aware that" PPE "had been slowed up by the central procurement."

These access-to-PPE questions were connected to long-term-care deaths—to date, in this province, 3,864 deaths in our long-term care—so the stakes are high. Companies stepped up for the province when they were desperate for PPE. The Premier has said, "Buying pencils in bulk saves money"—it is their Costco model for government—but building some local autonomy for emergency medical supplies into the procurement model will not only ensure businesses stay open for business, but will ensure we never get caught off guard again by another health care crisis. This is key to our success as a province, and the solutions are there. Ontario businesses just need you to listen and learn. Will you?

1150

Hon. Paul Calandra: In fact, we have done just that. I will say this: What we saw at the beginning of the pandemic was that Ontario's ability to secure this important PPE was hampered by the fact that there was not a centralization of that. Again, after inheriting a government that for 15 years—the previous Liberal government—did nothing on this, never envisioned a pandemic, we had to move very quickly, not only to ensure that there was a Canadian or an Ontario source of PPE, but also to begin some of that centralization so that we could offset the high costs that many of our local long-term-care homes, our hospitals, congregate care settings were telling us were becoming a barrier for them. The Minister of Long-Term Care stepped up to ensure that our long-term-care homes have access to very important PPE.

I understand what the member is saying. We are re-doubling our efforts to make sure that Ontario companies have access to government procurement in an easier fashion than they have before. More importantly, we want all Canadian-made manufacturers to have access to Ontario, because it's the right thing to do. It creates jobs and economic opportunity across the country.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Minister of Health. On November 18, I asked the minister about the government's plans and their priorities for COVID-19 vaccinations. The minister assured us that they would be ready and said that the government had entire teams working on this plan.

Three months later, Ontarians still don't have a clear sense of when they will be vaccinated. There is no registration available to begin the vaccinations. It's not clear what front-line workers will be prioritized, and it's not clear what serious medical conditions will be considered for early vaccinations.

What is clear, Mr. Speaker, is that Ontario is lagging behind other provinces. PEI, Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia all lead Ontario in per capita vaccinations.

Through you, how can a government that is seized with COVID-19 be so far behind in its logistical planning for vaccine distribution, and when will it provide clarity to Ontarians?

Hon. Christine Elliott: First, I would note that over 700,000 vaccines have already been distributed and given in the province of Ontario. We do have a plan. The plan is very clear. Right now, we have made sure that all residents of long-term-care homes have received at least one dose of a vaccine, either Pfizer or Moderna, and we are now proceeding with vaccinations for front-line health care staff, both in long-term-care homes, in hospitals, home and community care as well, and in retirement residences where they're seeing outbreaks.

We're going to continue with that. That's going to take another several weeks in order to be able to complete, at which point we will then be moving into the next phase.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: The minister said that they were not developing a comprehensive province-wide plan, that they were relying on public health units to give them 34 different plans for the province. With this lack of leadership, many public health units have taken it upon themselves to begin early vaccinations of the over-80 population. In Ottawa, the head of emergency protective services told council that he didn't want to wait for the province's online booking system because the risk to that demographic was simply too high.

Throughout the crisis, municipalities and local public health units have led the way, often stymied by government delays or inaction. It wasn't long ago, Mr. Speaker, that this government was planning massive cuts to public health right across the province.

Mr. Speaker, through you, will the government finally admit the value of well-funded public health units, or will it continue on its path to drastic public health cuts?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Speaker, through you, I would say to the member that we are supplementing the work that's being done. Our public health units are doing a fantastic job. And there is an overall plan. The overall plan is dictated by the prioritization that we have given first to the residents of long-term-care homes and to our front-line health care providers.

The 34 public health units have developed, within those rules and prioritizations, how they're going to proceed, because the prioritization plan is across the province, but how it works in different units is going to be different. What works for vaccinations in downtown Toronto is going to be different than Ottawa, than Thunder Bay, than Cornwall—across the province. It's really important that the public health regions and unit officers, who know their own area, who know the best way to proceed with these vaccinations, are given the ability to do that.

Now, some of them have been able to proceed, and some of them are already vaccinating the over-80-year-old

people who are living within their regions. I think that's something that we should be celebrating, not denigrating. They're doing—

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

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

FRENCH-LANGUAGE SERVICES

M. Jamie West: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. Depuis que l'Université Laurentienne s'est mise à l'abri des créanciers et alors que le ministre des Collèges et Universités s'est traîné les pieds pendant plus de six mois, on craint le pire pour la plus grande offre de programmes universitaires en français dans le Nord.

La semaine dernière, l'AFO a annoncé son intention de participer activement au procès en cour parce que—et je cite le président de l'AFO, M. Jolin—« personne n'aborde la question francophone et les droits de la communauté franco-ontarienne. »

Ma question est très simple : le premier ministre, va-t-il assurer la continuité de tous les programmes en français et de tous les postes de langue française à Laurentienne, oui ou non?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Parliamentary assistant, the member for Northumberland–Peterborough South, to reply.

Mr. David Piccini: Ma réponse en anglais, s'il vous plaît : Merci; thank you to the member opposite for that question.

This Premier and this government will always work closely with our post-secondary institutions, our colleges, our universities to ensure that we have robust programming for francophone students across the province of Ontario. It's why we've worked closely to ensure that a francophone university in Ontario is here to support our students. We're working closely with universities across the province of Ontario to expand teacher programming for francophone teachers, and we'll continue to work with our institutions across the province of Ontario to make sure that the francophone students across Ontario have access to the programs and services they need.

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

M. Jamie West: Encore au premier ministre : il faut rappeler aux membres du gouvernement que c'est à l'Université de Sudbury que Gaétan Gervais a créé et hissé le drapeau franco-ontarien. La Laurentienne est un point d'ancrage. On parle d'acquis et d'équité pour la minorité franco-ontarienne. Mais ni la Loi sur les services en français, ni le processus de restructuration en cours protège ou garantit la continuité des programmes et de l'éducation en français. La situation demande des actions concrètes.

Est-ce que le premier ministre va appuyer financièrement la Laurentienne pour sauver les acquis de la communauté franco-ontarienne en éducation postsecondaire, oui ou non?

Mr. David Piccini: Merci pour la question. I appreciate the question from the member opposite.

Two issues here: Absolutely, we're willing to sit down with the member to take any advice on how we can continue, as this government has played a leadership role in expanding access for francophone students across the province of Ontario. With respect to Laurentian University, we know that institutions are autonomous, responsible for the day-to-day finance, the operations, governance, strategic planning process.

We know COVID-19 has posed unique challenges on the colleges and universities in Ontario. That's why we launched over 50 sector-specific consultations where we worked closely with the institutions to ensure that they have the support they need. We know in northern Ontario, there are unique challenges. That's why we've continued with over \$80 million in operating funding to Laurentian University. Proportionally, we provide much more money to Laurentian University than other institutions.

We launched the northern Ontario special purposes grant of \$6.1 million; the teacher education stabilizing grants of over \$2 million to ensure francophone teachers and teachers alike in the north have the supports they need; the graduate expansion program of over \$7.9 million; and the Northern Tuition Sustainability Fund to build on the historic 10% tuition reduction provided to students across the province of—

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

DEFERRED VOTES

STAY HOME IF YOU ARE SICK ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 PERMETTANT AUX EMPLOYÉS MALADES DE RESTER CHEZ EUX

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

Bill 239, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to paid leave / Projet de loi 239, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne les congés payés.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bells will now ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. I will ask the Clerks to prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1200 to 1230.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 239, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to paid leave, has been held.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 35; the nays are 50.

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

Second reading negatived.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business at this time, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1232 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SICKLE CELL DISEASE AWARENESS DAY AND THALASSEMIA AWARENESS DAY ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA JOURNÉE DE SENSIBILISATION À LA DRÉPANOCYTOSE ET LA JOURNÉE DE SENSIBILISATION AUX THALASSÉMIES

Ms. Khanjin moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 255, An Act to proclaim Sickle Cell Disease Awareness Day and Thalassemia Awareness Day / Projet de loi 255, Loi proclamant la Journée de sensibilisation à la drépanocytose et la Journée de sensibilisation aux thalassémies.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member for Barrie–Innisfil care to explain her bill?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I would like to ask everyone's support for this day.

Sickle cell disease and thalassemia are the most common inherited blood disorders in the world. It's a debilitating genetic disease that can cause severe chronic pain, organ dysfunction, bacterial infections and many other serious complications. The lifespan of an individual with these disorders can be reduced by as much as 30 years.

Approximately 5% of the world's population are healthy carriers of the genes for sickle cell and thalassemia, with the percentage as high as 25% in some regions.

Although Ontario has now offered universal newborn screening for these disorders, there are still important gaps that remain. So by proclaiming June 19 in recognition as an annual day for sickle cell disease awareness—and a day for thalassemia awareness—we can continue to work, as a province, to move this issue forward.

PETITIONS

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank the residents of Amberwood retirement home for these petitions.

“Ban Retirement Home PPE Charges.

“Whereas Ontario’s retirement homes are largely privately owned corporations; and

“Whereas these profitable businesses have a responsibility for providing personal protective equipment (PPE) to their employees who work in their homes; and

“Whereas many retirement homes are adding PPE charges to the residents’ monthly bill, but the PPE is not for the resident but for the employees of the home; and

“Whereas residents of some Sudbury retirement homes have effectively organized letter-writing campaigns and actions to have these PPE charges to residents cancelled and recognized as a retirement home’s cost of doing business;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“Treat our province’s seniors with respect and ban any additional COVID-related fees, including PPE, to retirement home residents.”

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

LONG-TERM CARE

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

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Minister of Long-Term Care to pass Bill 153 and provide seniors with the right to live together as they age.”

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Lorne Coe: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas since the start of the pandemic, the growth of e-commerce has exploded and online shopping has doubled in Canada;

“Whereas with the dramatic increase in doorstep deliveries, thieves have more opportunities than ever before to steal packages addressed to consumers;

“Whereas one in three online shoppers in Canada say they’ve had a package stolen from outside their home;

“Whereas, if passed, the Trespass to Property Amendment Act would:

“—make Ontario the first province in Canada to impose provincial fines for package piracy;

“—impose a minimum fine of \$500 for a first offence, \$1,000 for a second offence, \$2,000 for each subsequent conviction, up to a maximum of \$10,000;

“—create a deterrent for package pirates while offering more protection to consumers, retailers and couriers from this costly crime;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario vote on and pass the Trespass to Property Amendment Act, 2020.”

I agree with the content of this particular petition. I will affix my signature and the date to it and provide it to the closest usher.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank J.P. Mrochek from my riding for sending this petition.

“MS Specialized Clinic in Sudbury.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

They petition the Legislative Assembly 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 physio-therapist and a social worker at a minimum.”

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

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Robert Bailey: This petition is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas small businesses required to close or significantly restrict services under the province-wide shutdown have suffered significant losses in revenue;

“Whereas small businesses need urgent relief to help navigate through the challenging period of the COVID-19 pandemic;

“Whereas, if approved, the small business support grant program would:

“—give struggling small businesses a minimum grant of \$10,000;

“—offer eligible businesses a grant up to \$20,000;

“—help businesses pay their bills and meet their financial obligations;

“—help businesses continue to employ people and support their local communities when it is safe to do so;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Ontario government’s initiative to help struggling small businesses through the Ontario small business support grant program.”

I agree with this petition, and I’ll affix my signature.

FRONT-LINE WORKERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank the hundreds of PSWs in my riding who signed this petition.

“Make PSW a Career.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“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;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario 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 fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk.

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LIFE INSURANCE

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I’m proud to present a petition entitled “Bill 219, Life Settlements and Loans Act, 2020.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas at a time when many people, especially seniors, are struggling due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, more needs to be done to meet the needs of vulnerable people;

“Whereas important updates in order to modernize the Insurance Act are required;

“Whereas changes are needed to allow Ontario seniors to access the fair market value of their life insurance policies which could potentially give seniors tens of millions of dollars more than they now receive, each year;

“Whereas, if passed, Bill 219 would:

“—modernize the Insurance Act to create a well-regulated secondary market in life insurance;

“—provide access to an alternative financial resource and allow Ontario seniors to access the fair market value of their life insurance policies;

“—ensure consumers are protected by requiring full, true and plain disclosure;

“—require a 10-day cooling-off period;

“—ensure the right to consult a financial or legal advisor;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario vote on and pass the Life Settlements and Loans Act.”

I proudly affix my signature to the petition, and I will be sending it up to the Clerk.

ANTI-VAPING INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Ray St-Jean from Val Caron in my riding for signing this petition.

“Protect Kids from Vaping...”

“Whereas very little is known about the long-term effects of vaping on youth; and

“Whereas aggressive marketing of vaping products by the tobacco industry is causing more and more kids to become addicted to nicotine through the use of e-cigarettes; and

“Whereas the hard lessons learned about the health impacts of smoking, should not be repeated with vaping, and the precautionary principle must be applied to protect youth from vaping; and

“Whereas many health agencies and Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada fully endorse the concrete proposals aimed at reducing youth vaping included in Bill 151;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To call on the Ford government to immediately pass Bill 151, Vaping is Not for Kids Act, in order to protect the health of Ontario’s youth.”

I will sign it and send it to the Clerk.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Will Bouma: I have a petition here entitled “Support the Ontario Small Business Support Grant Program.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas small businesses required to close or significantly restrict services under the province-wide shutdown have suffered significant losses in revenue;

“Whereas small businesses need urgent relief to help navigate through the challenging period of the COVID-19 pandemic;

“Whereas, if approved, the small business support grant program would:

“—give struggling small businesses a minimum grant of \$10,000;

“—offer eligible businesses a grant up to \$20,000;

“—help businesses pay their bills and meet their financial obligations;

“—help businesses continue to employ people and support their local communities when it is safe to do so;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Ontario government’s initiative to help struggling small businesses through the Ontario small business support grant program.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name thereon and give it to one of the ushers.

PUBLIC SECTOR COMPENSATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Cassey Mohns, who is from Capreol in my riding, for these petitions.

“Pandemic Pay....

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

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

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

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

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

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

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ACCELERATING
ACCESS TO JUSTICE ACT, 2021
LOI DE 2021 VISANT À ACCÉLÉRER
L'ACCÈS À LA JUSTICE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 25, 2021, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 245, An Act to amend and repeal various statutes, to revoke various regulations and to enact the Ontario Land Tribunal Act, 2021 / Projet de loi 245, Loi modifiant et abrogeant diverses lois, abrogeant divers règlements et édictant la Loi de 2021 sur le Tribunal ontarien de l'aménagement du territoire.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. It's good to see you in the chair.

It's always a pleasure to rise and speak in this House on behalf of my constituents and the riding of Brantford–Brant and Six Nations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been extremely challenging for us all, and we know that these tough times have exacerbated issues within our judicial system. That's why I am so happy to see our Attorney General, the member from Barrie–Springwater–Oro-Medonte; his parliamentary assistant, the member from Durham; and his ministry take the initiative to modernize processes by breaking down barriers in the province's courts, tribunals, estates law, family law, child protection sectors, and to promote diversity and transparency in our provincial judicial appointments process.

As the minister has stated, “Justice accelerated is justice delivered. No matter where you live in our province, the growth and well-being of our communities demands easier and faster access to a justice system that works for people. The advancements we are proposing to adopt in this bill will benefit people across Ontario by saving them money and reducing the time they spend waiting for their day in court.” Speaker, I could not agree more.

Much of what I'm about to say has already been mentioned by my government colleagues, but I would like to have the opportunity to echo their sentiments.

The current system can be archaic, and it is outdated. We owe it to our constituents, the people of Ontario, to make these necessary changes.

Bill 245, the Accelerating Access to Justice Act, if passed, would help fill judicial vacancies in the province, allowing people to be better able to have their legal matters heard by a judge more expediently and without delays. The proposed changes would maintain the current legislative qualifications in order to become a judge. These changes would also support broader efforts to encourage more lawyers to apply by moving the applications process online.

Speaker, Bill 245 would modernize our judicial appointments process by requiring the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee, or as the Attorney General says, the JAAC, to recommend candidates who have already been vetted for a similar vacancy within the past 12 months. The changes would also allow for a larger list of candidates to be considered by the Attorney General.

Other aspects of this bill that need to be taken into consideration with respect to the judicial appointments process are that we are reducing burdens and delays in the judicial appointments process by enabling the committee to hold interviews and meetings electronically, and introducing operational changes to digitize the applications process. Also, the committee would be required to publish detailed diversity statistics in their annual reports, using information voluntarily disclosed by applicants.

Speaker, the Attorney General recommends the appointment of provincial judges from a short list of at least two candidates who are recommended by the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee. The JAAC would still review all applications and conduct interviews before providing a recommendation of, at minimum, six candidates for that vacancy with supporting reasons. If the Attorney General does not find a suitable candidate in the list provided by JAAC, then they may request a new recommendation of six candidates that the JAAC would recommend. The Attorney General would be authorized to recommend to cabinet for appointment by the Lieutenant Governor any candidate recommended by the JAAC.

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The proposed legislative changes would, if a vacancy arises in the same location and with the same requirements as a previous vacancy advertised in the past year, require the JAAC to put forward candidates recommended from the previous vacancy. If the number of available candidates who were recommended for the previous vacancy is

fewer than six, the JAAC would then consider other candidates who applied for the previous vacancy but were not recommended at that time. The minimum qualifications for appointments would not change.

It has been about three decades, and this government could see it was time to take a modernized approach with Ontario's judicial system and update it for today and for the future. Everything we have done to advance this piece of our legal system has been targeted at maintaining the integrity and accelerating its important work. The government consulted with legal associations over the past year and addressed their very important input. We have listened, and so we have strengthened and refined our proposal based on their input.

Speaker, here are just a couple of supportive quotes that I would like to remind the opposition of with respect to our proposed changes to judicial appointments. This is one from the Ontario Crown Attorneys Association: "The OCAA appreciates the AG providing us with the opportunity to consult about the JAAC and JPAAC process. We support the movement towards increased transparency in the selection process." That was from Tony Loparco, president of the Ontario Crown Attorneys Association.

Here's another, from the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association: "The Ontario Trial Lawyers Association (OTLA) thanks the Attorney General for his continued commitment to consult with interested legal organizations regarding issues of common concern with the justice system. We agree with the minister that the list of judicial candidates he can consider for an appointment should be expanded to a minimum of six." This is from Allen Wynperle, immediate past president of the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association.

Despite the challenges that we are currently facing today, Ontarians require a system which is able to address unique circumstances while maintaining a safe and consistent process. The people of Ontario still need to be able to access and prepare legal wills and powers of attorney in spite of the difficulties that COVID-19 presents. Ontarians require assistance getting their affairs in order, but also have concerns about travelling in order to receive in-person services. In-person services have been difficult to access and have caused increased issues with receiving necessary assistance while following important COVID-19 guidelines. In response to the challenges of COVID-19, and through consultations with the estates bar, Ontario was able to allow temporary access to virtual witnessing of wills and powers of attorney through an emergency order.

Even after the pandemic is over, many Ontarians may have limitations accessing in-person legal services and require further modernization of the system to address individual circumstances. The modernization implemented through temporary virtual witnessing has made it easier for many Ontarians to access important services. The proposed amendments through Bill 245 would make the virtual witnessing of wills and powers of attorney a permanent option for Ontarians, provided that one witness is a licensed paralegal or a lawyer in Ontario. This can be done in a safe and secure manner which helps relieve

stress for Ontarians, removes barriers to legal services and recognizes the need for privacy and security in these matters.

Specifically, regarding powers of attorney, schedule 8 of Bill 245 would amend the Substitute Decisions Act, 1992, to allow powers of attorney entered on or after April 7, 2020, to be witnessed remotely with the use of audiovisual communication technology.

Schedule 9 of Bill 245 would make amendments to the Succession Law Reform Act. These amendments would allow wills made on or after April 7, 2020, to be witnessed remotely by means of audiovisual communication technology.

Once again, for the virtual witnessing of wills and powers of attorney, one witness must be a licensed paralegal or a lawyer in Ontario. Additionally, based on feedback received, the virtual witnessing of requirements will permit those signing to sign separate but identical documents. Signatures must be made during the same time period, and any other prescribed requirements must be met.

At the same time, our government is protecting the integrity of the system while allowing increased ease of access. The requirement to have two witnesses, one of whom is a licensed lawyer or paralegal, will remain in place in order to ensure the credibility of the process, and best practices will continue to be followed.

The option for in-person witnessing of wills and powers of attorney will remain for those who decide that that will work better for their personal situation.

The amendments proposed in schedules 8 and 9 of this bill will permit Ontarians to safely deal with legal matters while maintaining guidelines for physical distancing.

Before the temporary measures were introduced to allow for virtual witnessing, the Ministry of the Attorney General had heard from many Ontarians who were having trouble obtaining necessary legal services in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since that time, the temporary changes have given peace of mind to many who have gone through tough times and want to figure out legal matters in a safe and efficient manner.

Looking beyond the pandemic, many Ontarians may continue to find themselves in unique circumstances where in-person witnessing of wills and powers of attorney may continue to be difficult. Again, Bill 245 will allow Ontarians to use technology to have their wills and powers of attorney witnessed in a way that maintains integrity and credibility, while also accelerating access to these services and removing barriers that currently hinder access for so many in our communities.

Another item in this bill that I would like to briefly talk about is the consolidation of public accounting and updating accounting oversight laws within the Public Accounting Act, 2004, and the Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario Act, 2017.

Professional accountants are one of four professions that the Attorney General's ministry oversees in the province of Ontario. The Public Accountants Council for the Province of Ontario is a regulatory agency whose primary

responsibility is to designate bodies to license public accountants in Ontario. As part of the Accelerating Access to Justice Act—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I apologize to the member.

Pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader directs the debate to continue.

I recognize the member for Barrie-Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you, Speaker. Please continue.

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

The member for Brantford—Brant may continue.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's very easy to lose track of time when you're in here. I think too many of us like to hear the sound of our own voice—but I'll just leave that alone.

Another item in this bill that I'd like to briefly talk about is the consolidation of public accounting and updating accounting oversight laws within the Public Accounting Act, 2004, and the Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario Act, 2017—I know that's a review, but I'm just picking up where I left off.

Professional accountants are one of the four professions that the Attorney General's ministry oversees in Ontario. The Public Accountants Council for the Province of Ontario is a regulatory agency whose primary responsibility is to designate bodies to license public accountants in Ontario. As part of the Accelerating Access to Justice Act, our government is proposing to dissolve the Public Accountants Council for the Province of Ontario and transfer its functions to the Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario.

Our government wants to eliminate unnecessary duplication and oversight. By dissolving the Public Accountants Council for the Province of Ontario and transferring its functions to the Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario, this guarantees Ontario's accounting standards are more aligned with other Canadian jurisdictions. Both the council and the Chartered Professional Accountants have been consulted on this change and agree that this is the way forward. I'll be quite honest, Mr. Speaker: This is one of those things that I'd never heard of before, but it's great to see this simple common sense change to this.

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I'm going to read a quote from the Public Accountants Council for the Province of Ontario regarding Bill 245: "The Public Accountants Council of Ontario (PAC) fully supports the Attorney General's decision to transfer the responsibilities of PAC to CPA Ontario. Discussions on the future of PAC have been under way since the process to unify the accounting profession began in 2014 when the three predecessor accounting bodies functionally unified into one body—CPA Ontario. PAC's oversight and review of the CPA education, experience and examination programs has assisted in ensuring high post-unification

standards for Ontario CPAs through this transitional period. The changes proposed by the Attorney General will align Ontario's regulatory framework for public accountants with all other jurisdictions across the country, generating efficiencies and savings that CPA Ontario can reinvest into the profession. CPA Ontario has an established reputation for protecting the public interest, and the changes proposed will ensure the ongoing delivery of superior quality public accounting services in the province of Ontario." That's from Gavin Tighe, chair of the Public Accountants Council for the Province of Ontario.

These changes won't affect public accounting standards, and they will not undermine oversight of the profession. This change would support the government's commitment to improve access to justice for Ontarians across the system.

Speaker, our government is taking action to make it faster and easier to resolve land-related disputes in order to help increase housing supply across the province, while maintaining the needs of conservation and environmental protection.

Bill 245, if passed, proposes the merger of five land tribunals—the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, the Environmental Review Tribunal, the Board of Negotiation, the Conservation Review Board, and the Mining and Lands Tribunal—into a single new tribunal called the Ontario Land Tribunal. The proposed merger would not reduce or eliminate hearing or appeal rights before the tribunal. This revamped and updated Ontario Land Tribunal will help to reduce delays and make the land dispute resolution process more methodically structured by creating a single point to resolve disputes faster and eliminating unnecessary overlap between disputes.

The formation of the Ontario Land Tribunal builds on this government's dedication to creating a more accessible, responsive and resilient justice system that resolves disputes faster and equitably. Our government is determined to make the process swifter to resolve land-related disputes that are contributing to Ontario's housing crisis, while maintaining the needs of environmental protection and conservation.

Speaker, if I recall correctly, back in July 2020, our government created the Ontario Land Tribunals cluster to bring the five land tribunals under the leadership of a dedicated executive chair. In order to make the process more efficient and effective, we needed to consolidate these five tribunals into a single tribunal. But as of today, these five tribunals in this group remain separate entities with different legislative mandates, and some parties currently need to appear—if you can believe it—before multiple land tribunals to resolve their dispute.

This sole tribunal would have a single case management system, a single intake process and, in turn, that would alleviate bureaucratic red tape and help clarify Ontario law.

Here's a quote that I would like to read from someone I have a great deal of respect for: "Attorney General Downey continues to take decisive action to speed up and improve the experience Ontarians can expect when resolving land planning disputes in the tribunal system. This

game-changing reform will help make Ontario the leader in responsible growth in Canada.” That’s from Marie Hubbard, executive chair of the Ontario Land Tribunals. Madam Speaker, if you know any of the work that Ms. Hubbard has been able to accomplish in this role—I think when she took office, there were thousands of people waiting for an LPAT decision, and she systematically brought down that number. It was so impressive to see what happened.

Again, the proposed creation of the new Ontario Land Tribunal would help to reduce delays and make the land dispute resolution process more efficient by creating a single forum to resolve disputes faster and eliminate unnecessary overlap between cases.

I’ve heard from the opposition that we need to put more and more money into legal aid in order to help deal with a certain backlog of Ontarians trying to access it, and this justice modernization plan would help alleviate those wait times. For example, if you imagine 10 people waiting to get assistance from legal aid—imagine if four of those people could get assistance through online resources, such as we propose in this bill. That would, in turn, cut down on that wait-list by about 40%, allowing the remainder to get access faster to legal aid. Doesn’t that just make sense?

Another aspect of this modernization plan that was mentioned by the Attorney General is that for many of the processes in place today, it requires tens of thousands of pages of paper to be printed and copied when applications are made, distributed and stored. This is costly to not only the applicant but also to our environment. The Accelerating Access to Justice Act could potentially be good for the environment. Why would anyone in this Legislature want to continue with the status quo when we have the opportunity to save hundreds of thousands of pages of paper from having to be printed and physically stored?

Under the current system and prior to the COVID-19 measures our government put in place, Ontarians needed to have travelled to appointments or hearings via truck, car, bus or public transportation, but they could now potentially have the ability to do it online.

This modernization plan is pragmatic in so many aspects for the reality of today.

Madam Speaker, as I wrap up my time today, I want to again thank our Attorney General and his parliamentary assistant for all the good work that they have done on this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Listening to my friend from Brantford–Brant, I was thinking back to a few months ago and his Conservative cousins in Washington—Republicans pushing through the appointment of a conservative-minded judge with a couple of months to go before an election. Four years prior to that, with a year to go till the election, President Obama wanted to appoint a judge, but the Republicans blocked it. They had a set of principles for blocking it a year before the election and threw them out the window a month before the election.

Given that we’re going to have six possible appointees to be judges, if three of them have been known to support

the Conservative Party—to hold positions on the executive, to have made contributions—and two have been Liberals the same way, and one perhaps even a New Democrat, in your opinion, sir, who is the Attorney General of the day going to pick? Somebody who supported his party? Someone who supported another party? In your heart of hearts—who’s going to get the next judgeship?

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate the question from my friend across the way.

I don’t know; maybe he knows more than I do, but I’ve never seen a partisan nature in our judicial appointments system in the province of Ontario. I’m just not aware of anything like that. But again, I’m no lawyer. I’m just a small-town optometrist and a volunteer firefighter.

What I like about the proposed system is that in the event of—then we have more choices to make.

Knowing the Attorney General as I do and calling him my friend, I honestly believe that he would make the best possible appointment to the bench to do the best for the vast majority of Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: If I remember back to when we were debating this bill last week, the member brought up a really good point during the questions-and-comments section of debate here, and he brought it up again in his speech today. When we’re talking about moving people through the system faster and what that’s going to do for people who don’t have access to broadband etc.—I wish he could touch a little bit more on what that would mean to a lot of the folks in his riding. I know he represents an area very similar to mine, where we have a more urban centre surrounded by a lot of rurality, if you will. I would love to hear some more comments on that piece.

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate the question because I think it’s extremely valid.

In this instance, what struck me about reading through this legislation and what it brings to the people of Ontario—well, let’s start off with the fact that 94% of people in Canada, three years ago, already had access to the Internet wherever they happened to be, and we only see that improving, especially with the policies of our government.

We hear all the time that justice delayed is justice denied. So if we can take a small percentage of the people who are trying to access justice and move that online with simple tools to be able to do that, think of the resources that enables to be freed up for the rest of Ontarians who don’t have access to that.

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So any move that we make to increase access to justice for everyone, even if they don’t have Internet, will have increased the access to justice for every single person across the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It was interesting, listening to the member from Brantford–Brant, because he didn’t touch on one of the most contentious points of this bill which will make it very difficult for us to support, and that is schedule

6. This is the merging of five tribunals into one single tribunal. Remembering that tribunals adjudicate more matters in Ontario courts than courts do, you are actually putting a schedule in this bill which will make access to justice slower.

This schedule is potentially very harmful for access to justice for Ontarians. The bedrock justification for having tribunals is that they are meant to be faster, cheaper and more expert than the courts. This schedule is a major step backwards on all three of these grounds for the 100,000-plus Ontarians who appear before tribunals every year.

Why have you included schedule 6 in an access-to-justice bill?

Mr. Will Bouma: I thank the member from Waterloo for bringing this forward, because she just made an excellent case for exactly what we're doing in this bill.

In my time on county council, when I had to deal with people on a very regular basis making appeals for various reasons, the amount of duplication that would have to happen was stunning—the reports by different experts, the lawyers involved, and the different appeal tribunals that people would have to apply to.

It's interesting to think that we have moved the tribunals into one cluster inside the Ministry of the Attorney General with absolutely no negative consequences to the people of Ontario. What we're doing is just doing the next step of that process. Imagine if you can just go to one place and get the access to justice that you need instead of having to deal with five different—so I'm really excited about this, very much looking forward to it, and very supportive of schedule 6.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I've already debated on this bill with mostly good comments about the changes in the bill. I concentrated mine mainly on the importance of making sure the government would make changes for francophone rights, a measure that can be implemented meaningfully, so I left out the valid concern about judicial appointments.

Since I debated, I've been hearing and getting feedback from people in the legal community who have some concerns, and I want to raise them today with you. Being an optometrist, I'm sure you can see clearly that there might be some problems with the process that is being proposed here.

My question is, how is giving the minister unlimited choice to select a candidate for appointment more beneficial or improving judicial independence in a process that is non-partisan?

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate the double entendre by the member from Ottawa–Vanier. Thank you very much. I do try to see these things clearly.

By increasing the number, especially when we have—let's go back a little bit. We have so many unfilled judicial appointments in the province of Ontario. So being stuck in a system where there can only be two at a time before the Attorney General, if one of them ends up saying no for various reasons—by making that six, it means that we'll be able to get those appointments filled much, much faster, which means that the people of Ontario will see swifter

access to justice in having those judicial appointments filled.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Lorne Coe: On the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee: I would appreciate it, through you, Speaker, if the member could please explain to those who might be watching or listening this afternoon how the proposed change to fill judicial vacancies maintains the independence of the appointments committee and the integrity of the process.

Mr. Will Bouma: The current process to appoint provincial judges is outdated and slow. This has created obstacles, which I've already talked about, in filling vacancies, resulting in delays for people waiting for their day in court.

The proposed changes strike the right balance and maintain the integrity of the current appointments process for provincial judges while providing the Attorney General with a larger pool of qualified candidates for appointment. The Attorney General would be required to recommend only the appointment of candidates who have been recommended by the non-partisan JAAC. The Attorney General does not currently receive the names of candidates who are not recommended, and the proposed amendments to the process will not change that. These changes would maintain the current legislative qualifications to become a judge. These changes reflect feedback from justice partners. And these changes increase the transparency of the process.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): We don't have time for another round of questions.

Further debate?

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'm proud to be standing up today to speak to Bill 245, the Accelerating Access to Justice Act, 2021. As we've heard members say, this is a large omnibus bill. There are some schedules in this bill that are positive, and then there are also schedules in this bill that are deeply concerning.

I want to start off by saying that this bill does very little to truly provide access to justice—which the bill's name implies—by doing what advocates have been calling for for years, which is to improve and expand legal aid so that everyone, including the poor, can have their day in court if they are wronged or if they need to defend themselves.

I'd like to quote retired Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada Beverley McLachlin. She said, "The most advanced justice system in the world is a failure if it does not provide justice to the people it is meant to serve. Access to justice is therefore critical."

By this measure, our legal system is broken for many of us who reside in the province of Ontario.

I wanted to say those comments overall, and now I want to focus on one element of this bill, which I think is really the essence of what this bill is all about, and that's schedule 6. Schedule 6 is about helping developers and the pro-big-development industry build big at the expense of consulting and listening to municipalities, communities and residents. I want to spend a bit of time explaining what this bill does exactly, and then I'm going to delve into

some of the concerns that I can see with schedule 6 and some of the concerns that stakeholders have drawn to my attention.

Essentially, this is what the bill does: It proposes to merge five tribunals into one large mega-tribunal called the Ontario Land Tribunal. The tribunals that will be merged—there are five.

One is the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal. This tribunal has a big impact in my riding of University–Rosedale, like a lot of downtown ridings, because it concerns development, it concerns heritage, it concerns development charges, it concerns the City of Toronto Act, and it concerns the Expropriations Act. It is the appeal body that people go to when the city or the municipality want to contest a development or when developers want to contest a democratically decided city of Toronto or municipal rule. It has a big impact.

The other tribunals that are impacted by schedule 6 include the Environmental Review Tribunal, which appeals decisions made by the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks; as well as the Mining and Lands Tribunal, which appeals decisions made under the authority of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry or the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines; the Conservation Review Board, which adjudicates disputes related to heritage; and the Board of Negotiation, which deals with compensation for land expropriations—that is also relevant. As the transit critic, I had to deal with people who were very concerned about expropriations as a result of Bill 171 and Bill 222.

So those are the big changes, but there are some more that are quite concerning.

One is that this bill doubles down on the pro-development measures that were implemented with Bill 108. I'm really going to drill into the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal process here.

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What Bill 108 did is, it said, essentially, that an adjudicator could override a decision made by a municipality or the city of Toronto even if the municipality had made a decision that conforms with all relevant provincial planning rules. So the city of Toronto could pass a law, follow all the rules—its own planning act as well as all the provincial rules—and one man will come in through the OMB or the LPAT and say, “No, we’re going to change that rule to favour another interest.” And I’ve seen that experience myself. That’s pretty concerning—and what’s concerning about it is that this bill, schedule 6, doubles down on Bill 108 in a few ways. Number one, it allows a tribunal to dismiss a proceeding without a hearing if the tribunal believes the proceeding has no reasonable prospect of success. Let’s say the city of Toronto or a community group has some concerns about a development. Maybe it violates heritage rules or the Planning Act. They want to have their day in tribunal and have an adjudicator decide the merits of the case. Well, now a tribunal or an adjudicator can say, “I’m sorry, we’re not even going to hear the concerns that you have raised,” even though that adjudicator hasn’t heard any of the

evidence yet because it hasn’t gone to the tribunal to be heard. That’s really concerning.

The second thing schedule 6 does is, essentially, it denies the right of appeal. If you have a situation where the city of Toronto, for instance, wants to contest a decision at the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, they no longer have the right to appeal except in very, very specialized and unique situations. That is very concerning. It’s very concerning because the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, which used to be called OMB, is one of the most deeply disliked, undemocratic and powerful tribunals on land use decisions in the entirety of North America, and this government has just made this tribunal even more undemocratic and even more powerful. That’s really saying something.

I want to give you an actual example, because I dealt with this with Airbnb. The city of Toronto, in 2017, came up with a decision to move forward with fair regulations of short-term rentals, including Airbnb. They heard thousands of comments. These democratically elected city councillors representing over 2.5 million people made a decision to regulate short-term rentals to, essentially, limit it to peoples’ private residences. It was a compromise decision. Then what happened is, six Airbnb operators decided to take it to the OMB. They delayed implementation for four years—four years—even though thousands of people had already given comment, the democratically elected city councillors had already decided. And then it became up to one individual to decide whether this very important piece of legislation—the city of Toronto decided whether it was going to actually become the law or not. Just one person—fortunately, this person made the right decision.

But now, if that decision were going to be made today, that adjudicator—maybe because they’re pro-development, or because they’re in a bad mood—could just deny the actual hearing from taking place at all, and the city of Toronto wouldn’t be able to appeal. It’s really, really concerning that that’s how planning decisions are going to be made in the province of Ontario today. That’s what’s in schedule 6. I think that is a very bad decision.

I also think it’s important to emphasize that the Ontario government, over the last two and a half years, has made decisions that show a clear alliance between the people who are providing you with political donations in order to get elected again in 2022—and those people are staff and executives and CEOs of the big development industry in Ontario. We have seen this with this government’s enthusiasm with MZOs, where we have MZOs being approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to be given to developers to build big on pieces of land, and these developers are people who are giving maximum donation amounts to Conservative MPPs. That is really, really concerning. The Star has done a number of investigations on this. This is a recent one: “West Don Lands Developers Benefiting from Provincial Zoning Orders Donated \$25,000 to Ontario PCs.” That’s just an example. So you’ve got a situation where the people who are giving you money are also getting the right to build big and profit,

at the expense of communities and municipalities that want a say over the kind of development we build in our city and across Ontario.

I can see the impact of this kind of development in my own riding of University–Rosedale. The Gleaner, which is a local newspaper in my riding, did a summary of all the big developments that are happening in my riding—a very clear map. What's telling about the kinds of developments that are being approved by tribunals like the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal is that these developments are primarily geared towards wealthy purchasers—we've got one at 420 Dupont where the starting price is going to be \$1.3 million—or the kinds of developments where they're building big and the vast majority of the developments that are being built are micro condos, one-bedroom apartments, and not the kind of development that we truly need in this riding and in this city, which is affordable.

The reason I bring this up is because this government often likes to say, "We need to make developmental decisions more quickly because we need to address the affordable housing crisis that exists in the city of Toronto and beyond. That's why we need to speed this process up." But my concern is that when we actually look at the developments that are happening in our city, we are not seeing the kind of development that is benefiting the people of Toronto. We are seeing development that's benefiting investors and developers, who are making 15% to 20% profit on these buildings, but we are not seeing affordable housing. We're not seeing two-, three-, four-bedroom homes so that people can continue to live in our city. We're not seeing any kind of investment in community housing so that we can address the 15-year-long waiting list that we have in the city of Toronto for people who can't afford to live in our city and need help from the government and from municipalities to get by. With any of these sped-up development processes that run roughshod over communities, we're not seeing that actually translate into real, positive development that helps people. Supply alone has not and will not solve the problem of affordability. So that's a concern.

The other thing that I find very concerning about schedule 6 is that it makes it easier for expropriation to happen. What it does is, essentially, it repeals certain statutory duties and requirements that currently apply under the Board of Negotiation for LPAT so that you no longer need to inspect the land being expropriated, which is very interesting. There's no longer a timeline for the service of appraisal reports, the requirement of a written record of oral proceedings, or the requirement of written reasons for decisions and whatnot. I'm not sure if you're going to replace this with something else through regulation. But what I am concerned about when we see a speeding-up of the expropriation process is what we're seeing already with Bill 171 and Bill 222, and that is that homeowners and landowners don't get a fair hearing and they don't get a fair amount of money for the land they're going to lose.

I want to give you an example of what we're already seeing in Ontario because of your decision to expand this

sped-up expropriation process. This is our favourite, Metrolinx. This is a story that came out two weeks ago. It's about Noel Francis Chantiam. He owns a lot at the corner of Keele Street and Station Road in King City, and he has owned it for 22 years. Because of Bill 171 and Bill 222, his land can be expropriated very quickly under this sped-up expropriations process, which is now part of Bill 245. He found out that Metrolinx wanted his property so they could expand the GO train station next door. No one is opposed to that. He bought the property for \$750,000. It takes in \$10,000 a month in rent. So it's a property that generates revenue. Metrolinx appraised Chantiam's property at \$2.1 million. But guess how much they're offering him? A buck.

1400

Ms. Catherine Fife: No.

Ms. Jessica Bell: I kid you not. Metrolinx is offering him a dollar—I kid you not—because it determined the land is contaminated and will cost more than its appraised value to clean up. Well, that's Metrolinx's problem.

That is the value of having a fair expropriations process—so that homeowners and landowners get their day in court and they know they're going to get a fair transaction.

Expropriations need to happen. We already have a very strong expropriations law, but we don't want situations like this, where someone gets offered a dollar because you're changing the laws to benefit this government and not the people of Ontario. So I urge you to look long and hard at the expropriations changes that you're making, because it will have knock-on effects in your own ridings and ours. This government does not want experiences like this repeated. I find that extremely concerning.

I also want to look at a concern that a few stakeholders have raised with me around the challenge of merging these five tribunals, because it could undermine the expertise of the adjudicators. The reason why I say that is because schedule 6 allows any member of this new tribunal to sit on any of the other tribunals. You might have someone who is experienced with the LPAT, for instance—very experienced with development decisions, the planning process, the planning rules—all of a sudden having to hear proceedings about mining. That's a problem, because the whole point of a tribunals process is that you get people who are experts on these issues.

I want to give you an example that was raised to me, and this is what happened in 2012, when there was a joint tribunal with two OMB members—which is the LPAT, but just change the name; it's essentially the same thing—who wrote a blistering dissent after the majority approved a massive Walker Aggregates quarry within the Niagara Escarpment, over the objections of the Niagara Escarpment Commission. So you've got people who are looking at it from an environmental point of view, and then you've got people coming from the OMB who are looking at it from the developer point of view, and sometimes you might have a situation where bad decisions are being made because the wrong lens is being applied and the expertise that you need in a tribunal hearing is not there.

So I have a lot of concerns about this merging, around the expertise piece, and I encourage this government to

look into it, because we want our tribunals to make fair, impartial and expert decisions. When expertise is undermined, then that is compromised.

I want to conclude by talking a little bit more around the development piece. There's no question that we need development in our city. But speeding up the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal process and undermining the rights of municipalities and undermining the rights of communities in order to build big and fast, so that developers can make a huge amount of profit, is not the way that we are going to achieve the affordable housing goals that we need to achieve, as well as the vision we have of a world-class city that's livable and fair and kind and just, that has a place for everybody and is interesting, with small businesses that thrive. It's a problem.

So if this government is truly motivated to tackle this issue around development that's responsible, I encourage you to make sure that the adjudicators you bring into these tribunals truly represent the public interest, are experts in the tribunal they sit on, and go through a fair appointments process. Just running people through and not having them go to government agencies to be fairly questioned is a problem, because these tribunals are going to have a lot of power.

I encourage this government to also help communities navigate land use planning decisions and help them navigate the LPAT process. The reason I say this is because in Bill 108, this government got rid of the Local Planning Appeal Support Centre. This bill opens up that schedule. I encourage you to bring it back because communities need to have a say in how development happens, as well.

I encourage you to respect municipal decisions. The OMB doesn't do that, the LPAT doesn't do that; it should. The city of Toronto has a strong planning department. It makes expert decisions, and to then have them overridden through a one-man role in a fast-tracked tribunal process is deeply problematic. It doesn't lead to good decisions being made.

I also encourage this government to really think through how you are going to address the affordable housing crisis in this city, because it cannot be done through supply alone. There need to be other measures there. We're willing to talk with you to make that happen. But they need to be included in this bill, as well.

Thank you very much for your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Will Bouma: I thank the member from University–Rosedale for her speech. She finished by saying that the tribunal should always respect the decision of the municipalities, and I just wanted to ask her about that.

From my time on council and a lot of council decisions I've made and been a part of, and hearing the debate around the council table, municipal councils often don't like to face their constituents on a matter that they know makes sense, and they'll often make a decision knowing it will be overturned—back in my day, by the Ontario Municipal Board—so that they can look like they were fighting for issue X or issue Y.

So when you say that these planning appeals tribunals should always respect the municipalities, would you say that exclusively, or would you say that the municipal councillors are actually often counting on the higher level to make the right decision?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you for raising that matter.

I've not been a city councillor before. I can speak about the experience I'm having in University–Rosedale. There have been many decisions that have gone to the OMB or the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal that have overridden city of Toronto legislation that has been made democratically, and I have a lot of concerns with that.

There may be instances where a development has proceeded that makes a lot of sense. There have been some developments in my riding that tackle the issue of supportive housing and housing for people who were formerly homeless, and some community members have opposed them. In that case and in those situations, I would say that those kinds of developments, if they address a real need, need to proceed, so there is that balance there. But the OMB historically has been a deeply undemocratic tribunal, and it does need to be reformed.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I was at my breakfast table maybe three weeks ago reading the Sunday Star, and I read about a guy up in King City who paid \$750,000 for his auto repair shop. It brings in \$10,000 a month. The property is appraised at \$2.1 million. And Metrolinx said, "I'll give you \$1 for it because it has to be cleaned up."

How can anybody on that side of the House—who may be a property owner Metrolinx may want. If they say, "I'm only going to give you \$1" for something that you paid \$750,000 for and that is appraised at \$2.1 million, and it has to go to a tribunal with some guy who may be dealing with quarries instead of environmental factors or Planning Act factors—where is the faith that you want from the public of Ontario if Metrolinx can get away with offering you \$1 for that kind of property?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh for the summary of that article, which raised a very important issue.

There does need to be a fair expropriations process which includes a hearing of necessity and a real assessment of whether the homeowner is getting fair market value. The reason is that any one of us could have our home or our land taken, and we need to trust that the government is going to do a fair job. When we see situations like what's happening with Metrolinx, where someone is getting offered \$1, that undermines people's trust in the expropriations process.

What is concerning is, given the new transit priority projects this government is moving forward on, there are many homeowners who could be facing an expropriations process as unfair as that one. I do urge this government to really review that and look at it carefully.

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The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I was just listening to the member across.

I've been involved with the municipal township and the OMB and different processes, and I can tell you that there needs to be a referee or a board. Sometimes political councils across the province don't always have the right—without getting into trouble here, maybe they're not the right issues, or there's a partisan issue at heart and they need somebody to follow the rules of the province. They're there, for instance, with expropriations, to make sure the proper appraisals are done, so there's not just an offer made. That's why the board is there—to be challenged.

So how would one expect to improve the system, where we're looking at an existing tribunal that looks at it, whether it be the OMB or LPAT, to review appraisals and to find out what the proper one is—and throw out the idea that there may be some interest in the land that's not fair to the owner or the buyer?

Ms. Jessica Bell: When we went through Bill 171 and Bill 222, we did hear many stakeholders raise this issue around expropriations. I didn't hear a lot of concerns around the previous expropriation process that existed before those bills were introduced, because there was the hearing of necessity. Removing the hearing of necessity and speeding it up, I think, would lead to less fairness and less transparency, which is a problem.

One thing that I also think is really concerning about this bill is the removal of appeal for a lot of these tribunal decisions, especially LPAT. Having an appeal process that people and municipalities can use ensures that decisions are going to be made that are in their best interests. So I would return that appeal process.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Suze Morrison: I want to thank my colleague the member from University–Rosedale for her thoughtful debate today.

I do want to thank you for raising the issue of the development in the West Don Lands that we've been dealing with in Toronto Centre, as we watch this government try to steamroll over my community and demolish a heritage-protected site, under the cover of COVID-19 and, in fact, in violation of Ontario's heritage laws and any sort of good development process.

Now we have a government here who are trying to change the very rules of the game that they can't play by currently. I think that very seriously erodes the trust of the public in how these decisions are made and what processes are in place, because you can't even follow the current rules as they are.

Can you speak a little bit more about the importance of public trust in the process, and the importance of the government following its own planning rules with respect for the municipalities and respect for the Heritage Act?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the MPP for Toronto Centre, on that very concerning issue with developments that are proceeding in her community.

What the foundry issue touches on is the government's enthusiasm for MZOs, which allow the government to exempt itself from any municipal planning role, and then also to impose its own rules on a piece of land as it sees

fit. There is a huge amount of community opposition to the use of MZOs—not just in downtown Toronto, as in the case of the foundry properties in the West Don Lands, but also in areas all across Ontario and in areas that are near the greenbelt.

When you ignore fair planning processes, you create public outcry, which this government is currently experiencing now. Using this heavy-handed approach to build is extremely concerning.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Lorne Coe: The member opposite will know that in this particular bill there are aspects to enhance access for vulnerable Ontarians to get the help they need—particularly, proposed changes to the Office of the Children's Lawyer and the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee. Will the member opposite—and I'm assuming she went through the bill—support us in providing the tools that these particularly important agencies need to effect the work they're doing?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Whitby for raising some of the merits of this bill.

Yes, there are changes to the voice of the child in this bill, where it authorizes the Office of the Children's Lawyer to complete reports in family law cases before the court deals with disputes about parenting time and decision-making authority. We have no flags with that schedule.

There are some elements of this bill which are worthwhile. The challenge is that this government had a lot of concerns about introducing and pushing through massive omnibus bills—where we have some merited, good elements in a bill and also some deeply concerning ones that have nothing to do with accessing justice. So it's complicated.

But we have no flags with that schedule that you raised.

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

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I rise in support of the Accelerating Access to Justice Act because it is what is so needed in this province, which is to not only accelerate the access to justice, but stand in solidarity with those who for far too long found the justice system too expensive, inaccessible and does not translate to their language—and so, again, not making it accessible. Here on this side of the House, we are standing up for those individuals, in solidarity with them, and giving them the due justice that they need and the access to justice that they so need.

For example, in rural Ontario, for far too long we've seen that barriers need to be broken down so that they have that equal access to justice.

I know particularly in northern, Indigenous and francophone communities, for far too long they did not have that equal access, and now this bill will be granting that.

It's upsetting to see that there are parts of Ontario that had been historically underserved by an outdated justice system. And the issues to access the justice system, whether it's victim trauma or government expense—was

very much needed. Now you have that access, but it didn't come easily.

This government has been working day in, day out this whole time—not just in COVID-19, but well before COVID-19—to advance access to justice, so that everyone has equal access and equal opportunity to have their day in court. The original Attorney General, my neighbouring MPP for Bradford West Gwillimbury, did countless consultations, with emphasis on the francophone needs in the justice system. That was followed suit by my other neighbour, the now-minister and the MPP for Barrie–Springwater–Oro-Medonte, who also did this. Consistent through it all, we had the parliamentary assistant, the member for Durham, who did countless consultations around this province so that everyone feels heard and that this legislation reflects those. I want to thank the parliamentary assistant for all the work she has been doing, the miles that she has put on from one corner of Ontario to the next corner of Ontario. We did not leave anything—no rock unturned—to accelerate justice.

Let me just go over some of the key initiatives that were so important to put into this bill. We talk about backlogs in the justice system, and those backlogs are getting even worse now that we have this pandemic that we have to get through. Part of that is the need for filling vacancies. The Ministry of the Attorney General acted swiftly to accelerate some of those vacancies, but they saw the importance of codifying it in this bill so that we reduce those backlogs by swiftly filling these vacancies. Again, what does that mean to the person on the ground—because we talk about the people, in this Legislature. How does this legislation actually impact the person on the ground? Well, this means fewer backlogs for this person. They can have their fair trial in a court, whether it's online or in-person, and that will allow them to have that access.

One of the things that came out of this specific update is, we're not just filling the vacancies faster, but we're also requiring the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee to recommend candidates already vetted for a similar vacancy within the past 12 months. The changes would also allow for a larger list of candidates to be considered by the Attorney General. So not only are we bringing in accelerated access to the judicial system itself—but also to these vacancies, so other people can step up to the plate and be a player within the system. They can obviously run for some of those appointments and ask to be put on those particular panels.

1420

What else does this do? Well, other changes would reduce burdens and delays in the judicial appointments process. Those changes include enabling the committee to hold interviews and committee meetings electronically. We've seen this across the board—the fact that we have to get with the 21st century.

Some of these changes were made in the Legislature, as well, in previous bills. But that's going to mean that someone is going to have to get behind the wheel. Depending what case they need to hear, that might not be an easy thing for them to do. It might mean they have to

ask for assistance if they're, say, for example, in a wheelchair. Or it might be a senior resident who may not want to be leaving their home in the winter. I oftentimes talk about my area and how much snow we get. We love it, because it allows for people to go skiing, especially now that ski hills are open, but for some individuals to actually make that appointment in court—that's a hurdle they have to overcome. For them to have the option to go online is certainly more humane for them and speaks to the fact that that is good access for them to the justice system.

The other part is, of course, introducing the operational changes to digitize the application process. Again, everything is done in carbon copy these days. But we're in the 21st century, so why not be able to have that application process online?

The committee I was referring to would also be required to publish detailed diversity statistics in their annual reports using information that was voluntarily disclosed by the applicant. Again, we think about Ontario being a beautiful melting pot. I, for example, emigrated from Russia—some of my other colleagues from Sri Lanka, some others from Egypt, and so we have a lot of diaspora populations within this Legislature itself. That is a symbol of what our province represents. So I think the judicial system—it's about time, and our government recognizes that humanitarian need, the justice that is needed to make sure that you will have equal justice no matter your race, blood, creed, orientation or who you choose to love, that you have a justice system that reflects it. I know my colleague from Sarnia–Lambton also made that point during his remarks, when he spoke to this bill, and recognizes the need for equal access to justice.

But that's just one element of the bill. There's certainly much more, and it allows me to turn the page to talk about—from digitization, getting into the 21st century and getting with the times, to our children, our next generation. There could be some trauma that occurs by going through the judicial system, and of course we've been keen on helping them through that. Part of this refers to reducing, of course, the costs for the parents and the guardians when it comes to the Children's Law Reform Act. Why is that important? Well, I remember when I was knocking on doors, and a woman was telling me, "Can you believe it? That family law hasn't been reformed"—hasn't been updated, or whatever language you would prefer to use—"since the 1970s." That was a very important issue to her at the time. She also mentioned the costliness of it. She said, "Not only is it an outdated system, but it's costing so much money." Of course, that's something we heard. We had our parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Attorney General do countless consultations across the province. So what changes did we propose?

Well, Speaker, let me tell you. Under Ontario law, parents cannot receive money owed to their children, such as an inheritance, unless they have a court order appointing them as the children's guardian of property. However, if the amount owing is less than \$10,000, it can be paid directly to the child if the child has a legal obligation to support another person—a parent or person with lawful

custody of the child. The government is proposing—and this is listed in our bill—to cut the red tape for parents and guardians and reduce court costs and guardianship applications for children's property by removing that \$10,000 threshold from the act and increasing the amount by registration. That, in itself, is going to be a massive cost savings to these families. This would give families more discretion to manage their own children's finances and eliminate the costly court proceedings; again, giving them access.

If there's any debate whether or not this is giving access to these individuals—again, we talked about the senior citizens and people with different abilities who will benefit from the online method of being able to go to court. We talked about a lot of the digital elements that are happening that we could do. We talked about the accelerating of appointments so that we get quicker justice. Now we're talking about, of course, the children who would benefit from these changes.

On that same topic, in addition to that change that is going to affect the parents and the children, in this bill we're also proposing changes that would allow the Office of the Children's Lawyer to produce reports on specific issues set out in the views of the children or produce a report following a more comprehensive investigation. This change would help resolve family law cases that deal with very specific issues such as decision-making authority, parenting time and contact with children. This proposal would save families time and money as the reports can be prepared in a short time frame and can reduce delays in high-conflict family proceedings. The proposed amendment, which is in this bill we're debating today, would also clarify that these reports can be filed as evidenced in court, so again, that emphasis on giving equal access to those families and the better outcome of those children. So—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. Questions?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Last Friday, I had a chance to do a virtual tour of the Windsor Essex Child/Youth Advocacy Centre. It's at St. Clair College, as you know. Previously if someone suspected a child of being physically or sexually abused, they'd have to go to the police station or the children's aid society or the school and they had to tell their story. Now, with this one stop, you go to St. Clair College and the policemen are there but they're in civilian clothes and they meet with—the people ask them questions about what happened. It's a one-stop shop. I think there are five of them in Ontario. It was started by a federal grant. But now, there's no government funding. It's a charity; you've got to go out and raise your own money. This is for children who have been sexually or physically abused.

Accelerating justice for these people, abused and sexually abused children in Ontario—why not put something in the bill or something in the budget to help these centres do what they're organized to do for the youth in this province?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: The member raises a very valid point. I also have a CAS in the Barrie area, which I toured

with the Attorney General and saw the great work they do by not re-traumatizing the child. I had worked in Ottawa when those changes were made to create those five CASs so those children don't have to be re-traumatized.

At the time—I hear you—I think government sat way too long on not filling that gap. You had a federal government that stepped up to the plate, who helped fund a lot of these children's centres across the province and across the country. The fellow Ontario government didn't see a proper investment into these centres, and so it's now up to this government to fix a lot of those gaps.

I think a first step in that process is what we're debating here today. I hope that means the member is going to be supporting this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Lorne Coe: The member from Durham and myself share constituents who are francophones. This particular legislation increases access to justice for francophones, certainly in Durham riding as well as the Whitby riding.

Can my friend please provide some more particular insight, Speaker, through you, on the proposed changes and the effects of how this particular legislation provides access that hasn't been present for a better part of 15, 16 years?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you to the member for that question. He recognizes that we have 1.5 million Ontarians who speak French. That includes the over 622,000 Franco-Ontarians who make up the Franco-Ontarian community here in Ontario. So of course it was very important for this government to have that access to justice in both of our official languages.

I will say that part of this bill is increasing that access to justice in French and to all communities in French, not just in North Bay or downtown Toronto or Barrie–Innisfil but all across the province, because we have members of the Franco-Ontarian community across this province.

I thank the member for his question, and I want to thank him for all the work he's been doing with, of course, the member from Durham as well on their work to make sure there's equal justice and equal access to those in the francophone community.

1430

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Part of Bill 245 increases the authority of the Attorney General to make judicial appointments from a shortlist of judges. When this first came up in the fall of 2019, many legal experts spoke against it, including Peter Russell, who designed the current system. He said this raised concerns that this would open up the process to possible political interference. "They want a bunch of names so they can look down and find a nice soulmate Tory," he told the Globe and Mail at the time.

Now, we have raised some issues around patronage appointments, because there is a pattern of behaviour with this government. If you attend government agencies, you will see that pattern play itself out on a weekly basis. Do you not think that undermining the integrity of the political and judicial system will, in fact, create barriers to justice in Ontario?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: As I was mentioning in my remarks, this consultation on revising the judicial system has been going on for quite a bit. This isn't the only bill that was introduced, but certainly, when we heard the feedback by the gentleman that she had quoted, we took that into account as the government. It was over a year ago that that happened, and changes have been made since.

One of the things that you will note and that I had mentioned in my remarks is that now we can see the full list of candidates. It's something that I know the Attorney General—he was on TVO one night and he talked about that as well, the fact that sometimes they only see the top three candidates, which is not really fair. You want to know everyone who has really applied. Now the government can see that and work through the proper process of filling these vacancies.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: I'd like to move in the direction that I was with the member from Brantford—Brant, talking about, when we move a lot of these systems online, what that's going to do for the member's constituents in Barrie—Innisfil and how that will help people that maybe don't have access to Internet or feel marginalized in the system. How will it help them get through the justice system better than they were previously?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: That's an excellent question. Thank you for posing it. I think the outcome of making things more digital is two-fold: One, you have the ability for people to access it online for their convenience if they don't want to leave their home for various reasons, but then that shortens the queue for those who are actually going to the in-person court. Frankly, you're actually shortening both queues, because now you have two different ways to access the justice system, which is, I think, a wonderful thing that the minister had come up with for this bill.

But it doesn't even stop there. You have the generation of students that are growing up today, and many of them are doing a lot more online and that's more convenient for them. So I think it's actually also thinking of the next generation of individuals who are going to be accessing justice. That's what they're used to. They're not used to going in person. So we're making it accessible for generations to come.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I would like to ask the member's views on what happens when a low-income, marginalized, disadvantaged person doesn't have technology at home to be able to use some of these new digital tools. We know from the debates that we've had in this Legislature about the cuts to legal aid that people won't be able to engage in the justice system if they don't have the support that legal aid provides. We don't see any of that in this bill. I'm wondering if that's going to be in the budget so that those who don't otherwise have access to technology can actually make use of these new virtual tools that are being provided.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I almost answered that member's question in my opening remarks and previous questions I had answered, but I will say this: There is so

much savings in this bill for those individuals to have access to justice. I mentioned the \$100,000 threshold when it comes to the children's law reform. I also mentioned other accessible services that are going to save them money.

Of course, I mentioned the fact that there's a choice now when it comes to accessing justice, whether it be doing it online or going in person. Some people might choose to go online because it saves them things like transit costs and other things that are related to that particular avenue to access justice systems. But in all of this, we're streamlining it, so it does save the parents money. Whether it's family law—our previous bill we introduced: again, reducing a lot of those burdens and those costs.

Most importantly, the biggest cost of justice is time. So by clearing the backlog, we're saving those individuals money.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Unfortunately, we don't have time for another question.

Further debate?

Ms. Suze Morrison: It's a privilege to rise and speak to Bill 245. I firmly believe that your income, your race, the neighbourhood that you live in, the country that you were born in, the languages that you can speak—none of these should determine how well the legal system works for you, and that's really what access to justice is about.

We can make sure that the justice system works for everyone, but we need to stop cutting, like this government insists, and start investing in the system if we're going to achieve meaningful access to justice for everyone in this province. Far too many people in Ontario are unable to access the justice system that they deserve. It's the responsibility of all of us as legislators in this House to speak out when we see those injustices in the system.

Speaker, I think one of the greatest injustices that we've seen within the justice sector since COVID-19 started has been the tribunal responsible for adjudicating disputes between landlords and tenants. COVID-19 has certainly made the situation worse, but before the pandemic even began, this government was hacking away at legal aid, attacking tenants' rights and under-resourcing the Landlord and Tenant Board for years—all of which laid the groundwork for COVID-19 to create pressures on the Landlord and Tenant Board that have just wreaked havoc on that system and, in turn, on the tenants who are trying to navigate it.

This has deepened the social and racial inequities that have exacerbated the struggle that folks already have navigating the system and trying to preserve their tenancies. When their tenancies are so vitally important to maintaining their health—housing is a public health measure at this point in the pandemic.

This government has used the cover of the pandemic, though, to expedite legal hearings for thousands of tenants facing evictions, while ignoring the rampant problems at the Landlord and Tenant Board. They created a system that relies on online hearings that disadvantage the most vulnerable people in our communities, and they've been riddled with technology problems since day one.

Back in October, the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario released a report detailing the problems at the Landlord and Tenant Board that have been happening since the start of COVID-19. From that report: “The past six months have been a challenging time for organizations across the justice sector. We appreciate the reality that the LTB has, like all of us, been forced to adapt to unprecedented circumstances. However, as the impact of recent developments at the LTB (in particular, those since the LTB began resuming ‘regular’ (remote) operations on August 1) becomes clear, we are compelled to speak out. In addition to having a particularly devastating effect on socio-economically marginalized communities—the people who our clinics represent—the pandemic has underscored the importance of having a safe place to call home. For example, members of many Black communities—already facing the brunt of the pandemic—are renters who live in the” same “geographical areas with the highest rates of eviction filings. Such geographical areas, at least in Toronto, have also been places where marginalized communities have faced the highest incidence of COVID-19, thus creating a dangerous situation of double jeopardy.

“As the body tasked with adjudicating disputes over eviction and tenants’ rights, the LTB has a unique responsibility to ensure that its response to COVID-19 does not unfairly exacerbate homelessness or the effects of the pandemic upon racialized, Black, and Indigenous communities, as well as renters living in poverty. It cannot operate outside of this real-world context. The injustices our clinics have witnessed, overheard and attempted to assist tenants with—far beyond the inconveniences to be expected from adjusting to remote hearings and service delivery—lead us to request that the LTB revisit its approach to ‘re-opening.’”

Speaker, this report that ACTO put out for us back in October was horrifying. I mean, some of the stories that it detailed really echoed the same things those of us who were sitting in and witnessing these online eviction hearings, which one member referred to as an “eviction blitz”—it really validated what we were seeing on the front lines of this tribunal during the pandemic.

The virtual hearings have been riddled with tech issues, as I’ve said. Participants have struggled to participate when it’s their turn to speak, and in the case of one hearing I listened to, even the adjudicator was becoming frustrated. Legal aid lawyers who are trying to assist their clients as tenant duty counsel may only have minutes to review the case. There are no private rooms for them to speak to their tenants privately to discuss their cases. For tenants to actually receive legal aid through these online hearings, they have to broadcast their personal information into an open online hearing and then disconnect from the hearing. The legal aid lawyer calls them on their phone number, they access legal aid, and then they have to reconnect to the hearing for a second time.

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Where do people fall through the cracks there? Well, we heard from one tenant who was a survivor of domestic violence, who specifically asked the adjudicator to not be

put in the position of having to broadcast her personal contact information into an online hearing, because she was a survivor of domestic violence and the hearing was not secure or private; it’s publicly broadcast online. The adjudicator said, “No, if you want to access legal aid help, this is just the process that we have.”

If we’re designing an online system that can’t adequately provide a safe response to a survivor of domestic violence, what are we doing? Are these the folks we trust to completely overhaul our justice system, when you’ve had a chance to try to undertake modernization and digitization of our tribunal system during COVID-19, and this is how utterly you failed at that process? I do not trust this government in terms of how they’re trying to overhaul our tribunal systems.

I want to speak next a little bit about the planning process, the specific impacts that that has had on my riding and the implications that this bill has on the local planning process. In my riding of Toronto Centre, residents are incredibly concerned about what has been going on at the Dominion Wheel and Foundries buildings down the West Don Lands; I know my colleague from University–Rosedale mentioned it, as well. The folks in that community have, quite frankly, lost their trust in that government. They worry that instead of a fair, open and transparent process, the development that’s happening there has in fact been decided upon behind closed doors—returning favours, they feel, for folks who are in the Premier’s inner circle, folks who are donors to the Conservative Party. They don’t understand why a beloved and cherished heritage property in the West Don Lands can be just demolished the way it has been.

No one knows who the developer is. There’s no development proposal for the site. They’ve completely overrun the city’s planning process as they proceeded here, and have arguably broken the law with regard to the Ontario Heritage Act. My community is frustrated and they don’t understand why. My community is demanding transparency and an open and fair planning process here, one that will help the community bring forward their concerns, their ideas and their vision for restoring heritage on the site.

A fair planning process is an issue of concern for folks across my riding, not just in the West Don Lands with regard to the foundry. We hear these concerns in neighbourhoods like the Church and Wellesley Village, as another example, where development pressures are forcing out the queer- and trans-owned businesses. These spaces are just not small businesses, Speaker; they’re a living history of queer and trans liberation in the city of Toronto. The loss of these businesses as a result of planning that favours the developers, and not the local community, will have and is having a devastating impact on queer and trans communities in that neighbourhood.

We need to recognize that local communities have a right to say how our neighbourhoods are built up, and that the biggest developers with the biggest piles of money shouldn’t get to come and erase our history and our communities. Whether that’s erasing the history of the

Dominion Wheel and Foundries building or whether that's erasing the history of queer and trans liberation in the city of Toronto, it's not right and it's not fair in either circumstance.

were a few other things I wanted to speak to, primarily my concerns around legal aid and the fact that we're talking about a bill that's about access to justice. We can't have access to justice in this province without properly funded legal aid—a legal aid system that, I will remind this House, this government cut by 30% in 2020. All of your fancy online tools and websites cannot replace the legal expertise of a legal aid lawyer trying to help vulnerable people through a legal system that ultimately disadvantages them. You know, we have online tools. We have CLEO. We have Steps to Justice. These resources are fantastic and amazing, and sure, we need more of them, but it doesn't replace a legal aid lawyer. Slashing and cutting our legal aid system is not how we achieve access to justice in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, I see I've run out of time, but I look forward to the questions and comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions? The married—the member for Barrie—Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you, Speaker. I did get married, so thank you. That's great.

My question is to the member opposite. She did speak very passionately about the bill, especially the example she used about the individual being traumatized in court and that someone could be there who is the perpetrator. By having another option of not having to go in person to the courthouse where some of those individuals could be present, re-traumatizing the victim, they can now use other methods such as online, still having access to their lawyer, but now they don't have to be in the physical courtroom. What impact does she think that has on that individual who does not have to be re-traumatized and has another option to access the court system?

Ms. Suze Morrison: I think my first response to that is that it's about choice. When we look at the Landlord and Tenant Board, which that example is from, currently tenants have no choice. In fact, when tenants, particularly those with disabilities, have requested in-person hearings to accommodate their disabilities, they have been denied in favour of this fast-tracked online process which is simply an eviction factory forcing thousands of tenants out into the street in the middle of a pandemic.

But my question back to the member is: What is your government doing to ensure that the changes in this bill are done in a trauma-informed way, so that survivors of sexual violence and gender-based violence are supported through that court process? I'm not sure I see that. What are you doing to ensure that the case that I presented of a domestic violence survivor isn't replicated again in your new process?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: You know, spring is almost here. Spring training is coming. I know the member for Kitchener—Conestoga is waiting for his Blue Jays to hit the field. My Detroit Tigers, I hope, will do better this year.

But I don't want to talk hardball; I have a softball question for my member from Toronto Centre. Knowing full well the backlog in the landlord and tenant tribunal and the board, we went to the Attorney General, we went to the Ministry of Housing and we tried to get more adjudicators lined up, and they just couldn't find them.

With all this merging of tribunals, is there any hope at all, in your opinion, that the backlog at the Landlord and Tenant Board is going to improve? Are we finally going to see an acceleration of justice for the people who have been trying to get an appointment at the board to resolve their landlord and tenant issues?

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you so much for the question. I certainly don't see things getting better. In fact, the pressures that we're seeing at the Landlord and Tenant Board in terms of the backlog, I would like to remind the members of this House, started about a year before COVID-19 even hit our communities. For a full year in this Legislature, I was calling on this government to fill the vacancies of adjudicators at the Landlord and Tenant Board, and you sat on your hands and refused to do it.

Then, when the pandemic started, you all cried, "Oh, so sad. We have such a huge backlog. Now is the time we're going to ramp into gear." As soon as the pandemic started, now all of a sudden we care about appointing adjudicators at the board, now that there are thousands of families at risk of evictions through no fault of their own, because they lost their jobs this year because of COVID-19. Now you care about how efficiently the Landlord and Tenant Board is running, so that you can fast-track evictions of tenants in Ontario. It's shameful.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I listened intently to the member's debate there, and she seems to have a lot of questions concerning what our government has done to improve access to justice. I would strongly encourage the member to actually read the bill, because the bill itself indicates what those changes are.

But with respect to access to justice for a diverse group of communities across Ontario, one thing that we're doing is we're modernizing this. We're making it more approachable. We're making it more accessible. We're making it easier for people to figure out what kind of legal help or legal solutions are out there for them.

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My question to the member is, will she support us in our plan to help modernize the justice system to make it less scary for Ontarians, to make it more accessible for Ontarians and to make it easier for them to access the information that they need?

Ms. Suze Morrison: I have to say, I found the first part of the member's question a little bit condescending.

Nonetheless, what I will say is that if your plan to make our justice system more accessible includes restoring the 30% funding cut that you slashed from the legal aid budget a year and a half or two years ago, then sure, I will support you 100% in restoring the 30% funding cut to legal aid and making sure that folks in Ontario actually do have legal experts through our legal aid system to help them navigate

the justice system. If that is your plan to improve access to justice for low-income Ontarians, for racialized communities, for people with disabilities, then yes, I support that.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: That was a really excellent presentation by the member, particularly because she has such personal experience fighting for folks who have been trying to traverse the Landlord and Tenant Board as well.

Schedule 8 is obviously a poison pill that you've stuck in there because of the cuts that you made to legal aid. While of course having access to powers of attorney through the means of audiovisual communication in theory is good, your own members have told us that only 94% of the folks have access to Internet or computers; the other 6% who require access do not.

I feel like the government has baked privilege right into this piece of legislation. Why do you think they would intentionally design a piece of legislation that supposedly accelerates access to justice, leaving out 6% of the most vulnerable people that we're serving in Ontario?

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you so much to the member from Waterloo for the question. You've hit the nail on the head. What we've seen at the Landlord and Tenant Board is that there is this assumption that has happened with how the proceedings have moved into online hearings that every single person that needs to access that hearing (a) has access to Internet or (b) has access to a phone or a computer to participate in their own hearings. It's simply not true. It is not true for people who are living below the low-income cut-off, who can't afford Internet at home, who can't afford to keep minutes on their phone, who can't afford a computer. It's certainly not true for folks in rural communities, who don't have access to the broadband, to the Internet infrastructure that they need.

Designing a system that only works for those who can afford it is actually the opposite of access to justice. If this government isn't going to recognize the inherent issue around people in poverty and people in rural communities not having access to technology and the Internet, you've missed the point.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Lindsey Park: I was interested to hear the description by the opposition that schedule 8—this is the schedule that allows remote witnessing of powers of attorney—is a poison pill. There has been broad support for this change. In fact, there was a private member's bill brought by the member for Thornhill on this very topic that received lots of support. It merely gives people the option—the choice—if they want to participate virtually in having their powers of attorney witnessed. This actually doesn't have anything to do with the Landlord and Tenant Board.

I want to know: Do you support schedule 8?

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you so much to the member opposite for the question. As I said in my remarks, I think we have raised some very significant concerns with what moving to online systems in our justice system means for people who are the most vulnerable in our

communities. We have raised significant concerns in this House that it's not being done in a way that accounts for the lowest-income Ontarians, folks who are coming from Black and Indigenous and racialized communities who are overly policed and overly exposed and pushed into the justice system in different ways.

As we have reiterated again and again and again, if you're not doing this process in a way that accounts for the fact that not everyone in the province has access to Internet or has access to a computer or access to a phone, you are going to miss those people in your process. You need to account for the fact that planning in the justice system and digitation of the justice system needs to be done from an equity-based lens.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): We don't have time for another question. Further debate?

M^{me} Goldie Ghamari: L'engagement qu'a pris notre gouvernement d'élargir l'accès aux services pour les Franco-Ontariens et tous les francophones s'étend au secteur de la justice. Nous continuons de collaborer avec des partenaires importants aux quatre coins de la province pour favoriser l'accès à la justice en français. Je suis sûre que cette loi, si elle est adoptée, élargira l'accès à la justice pour les Franco-Ontariens. C'est pourquoi je suis ravie de prendre la parole aujourd'hui pour passer en revue les importantes mesures que contient le projet de loi, Loi visant à accélérer l'accès à la justice.

J'ai eu la chance de travailler avec mes collègues et la ministre des Affaires francophones dans l'objectif d'améliorer l'accès aux services en français et les services pour les 1,5 million d'habitants de la province qui parlent français, dont plus de 622 400 Franco-Ontariens qui font partie de la communauté franco-ontarienne.

Je crois fermement que promouvoir et encourager l'accès à la justice en français est essentiel pour le bien-être à long terme et le développement de la communauté francophone en Ontario. En fait, l'accès à la justice est un pilier de notre démocratie, et pour assurer le respect de ce droit fondamental, nos institutions judiciaires doivent être ouvertes, attentives et capables de répondre efficacement aux besoins des citoyens.

C'est pourquoi je suis fière de soutenir ce projet de loi qui permettra de combler les lacunes qui existent pour les francophones dans le système de justice actuel. Aujourd'hui, il existe plusieurs différences dans les lois provinciales en ce qui concerne l'accès à la justice en français, dont le droit de déposer des documents rédigés en français. La Loi visant à accélérer l'accès à la justice propose d'effacer ces différences et d'améliorer l'expérience des francophones qui utilisent le système judiciaire.

En effet, un aspect fondamental du projet de loi est la possibilité de déposer des documents judiciaires en français dans tout l'Ontario. Cette option améliorera l'accès à la justice en français en garantissant aux francophones la possibilité de déposer des documents en français dans tous les palais de justice de l'Ontario et pour tous les types d'affaires, y compris les affaires civiles et familiales. Cela assurera le respect des droits linguistiques

des francophones dans toute la province, quel que soit le point d'accès au système judiciaire.

Le projet de loi propose aussi une autre mesure pour améliorer l'accès à la justice : élargir le droit d'obtenir la traduction française de documents déposés dans tous les tribunaux de l'Ontario, ainsi que le droit de recevoir la traduction des motifs de décision. Ce sont des changements qui avaient été recommandés au procureur général Downey par le Comité consultatif du procureur général sur l'accès à la justice en français et qu'a endossés l'AJEFO.

Je cite le président de l'AJEFO, Marc Sauvé : « L'Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Ontario (AJEFO) demande depuis longtemps que des changements soient apportés à la Loi sur les tribunaux judiciaires portant sur les instances bilingues. L'AJEFO est donc ravie d'apprendre que le gouvernement provincial propose des changements à cette loi, notamment afin de permettre à toute personne de déposer des documents rédigés en français à tout moment, et ce, à l'échelle de la province et non seulement dans certaines régions. »

La Ontario Trial Lawyers Association s'est également montrée favorable à ces réformes. La membre Éliane Lachaine a déclaré : « Ontario Trial Lawyers Association (OTLA) salue l'expansion des services en français dans tous les palais de justice et pour toutes les affaires en Ontario. Les victimes francophones d'accidents auront un meilleur accès à la justice, car elles ne seront plus obligées de payer des services de traduction. C'est un énorme progrès pour les francophones de l'Ontario. »

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Ce changement proposé donne suite aux efforts déjà déployés en Ontario pour favoriser l'accès à la justice pour les francophones, comme par exemple le formidable nouveau plan d'action pour North Bay. Le plan d'action pour l'amélioration de l'accès à la justice en français à North Bay mise sur le succès des partenariats avec la Cour supérieure de justice et la Cour de justice de l'Ontario, à Sudbury et à Ottawa, et prévoit l'élaboration de nouvelles pratiques qui pourront être mise en oeuvre à North Bay et un peu partout dans la province.

Nous sommes sûrs que ces changements permettront de renverser les obstacles à la justice pour les francophones, quel que soit l'endroit où ils vivent dans la province.

Ces plans d'action pour l'amélioration de l'accès à la justice en français ont réussi l'exploit de rassembler des partenaires dans un but commun : l'élimination des obstacles et problèmes de longue date qui ont retardé l'accès à la justice pour les francophones.

En 2015, le gouvernement de l'Ontario a lancé un projet pilote, en collaboration avec les juges en chef de l'Ontario, qui visait à assurer un accès fluide à la justice en français dans le palais de justice d'Ottawa. Cette initiative était un projet collaboratif avec la Cour supérieure de justice et la Cour de justice de l'Ontario. Le commissaire aux services en français a reçu des plaintes sur la qualité des services offerts en français aux comptoirs des tribunaux d'Ottawa. Il y a aussi des plaintes concernant l'exercice des droits linguistiques en français dans des instances judiciaires à Ottawa.

Le projet pilote a contribué à réduire les risques d'obstacles pour les parties, les avocats et d'autres utilisateurs francophones dans le palais de justice d'Ottawa. Il prévoyait d'informer les utilisateurs francophones des tribunaux de leurs droits linguistiques dès le début de la procédure judiciaire.

Par ailleurs, dans le cadre du projet, les services en français devaient être visibles, accessibles et annoncés, et la qualité des services offerts en français devait être équivalente à celle des services offerts en anglais. Ces normes s'appliquent aux services fournis par le personnel du gouvernement, comme les services téléphoniques et les services au comptoir.

Dans la foulée du succès du projet d'Ottawa, un comité consultatif sur l'accès à la justice en français a été créé. Il se compose de représentants de la magistrature, du barreau, du gouvernement et d'universités. Ce comité prodigue des conseils au gouvernement sur l'élaboration de stratégies relatives à l'accès à la justice en français. Ses conseils ont éclairé nos efforts continus pour soutenir les francophones qui utilisent le système de justice.

Dans le cadre de ces discussions et de notre collaboration continue avec les tribunaux, notre gouvernement a établi un projet pilote semblable à Sudbury, où, comme vous le savez, il y a une grande population francophone.

Je dois absolument mentionner l'appui de nos partenaires dans les tribunaux. Notre collaboration a été formidable.

Comme pour Sudbury et Ottawa, le dernier plan d'action assurera que les services en français sont visibles, accessibles et annoncés. Il assurera que les utilisateurs francophones des tribunaux de la région peuvent exercer leurs droits linguistiques le plus tôt possible dans leur instance. En outre, le plan d'action vise à cerner les obstacles à l'accès à la justice en français en essayant de nouveaux processus et initiatives pour renverser ces obstacles.

En outre, pour aider les francophones qui ne savent pas quels avocats peuvent les représenter au tribunal, Aide juridique Ontario a modifié ses listes d'avocats pour inclure la langue de prestation des services.

Madame la Présidente, notre gouvernement n'a pas fini d'améliorer la vie des Ontariens qui parlent le français. Nous continuerons de veiller à ce que les Franco-Ontariens puissent exercer leurs droits dans chaque coin de l'Ontario, y compris le droit essentiel de l'accès à la justice en français.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's interesting, some of the points that the member has made, but the one thing that no one on the government side is talking about is that it gives fairly unprecedented powers to the Attorney General, including that the new legislation also authorizes current and former Ontario Attorneys General to be called to the Ontario bar without having to meet Law Society licensing requirements. The Attorney General's office commented on this component of the legislation, saying that this perk applies to Attorneys General who are not lawyers.

What part of ensuring that former Attorneys General can be called to the bar improves access or accelerates access to justice for Ontario citizens?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I'd like to thank the member for her question. I appreciate the thoughtfulness that was put into it.

Madam Speaker, a person who is or has been Attorney General of Ontario or Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada would be entitled to be called to the bar of Ontario without complying with the Law Society Act or any of the regulations or rules of the society. This would apply to individuals who are not lawyers as long as they are or have been the Attorney General of Ontario or Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada.

Aside from that, there are no other changes being made to the licensing requirements. So for anyone to be called to the bar, they would have to go through law school and then write the bar exam. At that point, they would have to be called to the bar and then they would have to actually be practising law to be able to provide legal services in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Robert Bailey: My question to the honourable member is, I understand that a number of lawyers, legal people in the province of Ontario, still use the title—"case masters," I think the word is. Could you please explain, member, why it's important that we change this title in Ontario and the importance behind that?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I'd like to thank my colleague for the question. We actually do have case management masters in Ottawa. I remember when I first appeared in an Ottawa court, it was kind of strange to call someone a "master," which seems sort of antiquated, I guess. Being someone from a visible minority background and an immigrant and having a different background and different life experiences, I think what our government is doing here is formidable. I'm proud to be part of a government that wants to ensure that all Ontarians have confidence in the Ontario justice system's ability to be inclusive, safe and welcoming. Oftentimes various racialized communities in the legal community have indicated that the use of the word "master" is no longer appropriate and is racially insensitive. Our government has listened to these stakeholders and is proposing the removal of this title, and I do hope that my colleagues on the other side will support us in this change by voting on the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Jessica Bell: I want to raise the issue of expropriations. In the recent example I gave of Noel Francis Chantiam, he is about to lose his home, which is valued at \$2.1 million, but Metrolinx is saying they're only going to give him \$1 for his property. The reason why I want to bring this up is because Bill 245 does change the expropriations process for not just transit projects, which is the situation in this case, but for matters related to expropriations overall. It's very concerning. What is the member going to do to make sure that the expropriations process is fair to homeowners and landowners?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Madam Speaker, we are proposing to streamline, modernize and simplify the expropriations process by transferring the inquiry officer's function for hearings of necessity to the Ontario Land Tribunals.

Non-binding hearings of necessary sometimes occur at the beginning of the expropriations process. The purpose of the hearing is to determine whether or not expropriation of an owner's land is fair, sound and reasonably necessary in the achievement of the objectives of the expropriating authority. It is not a hearing on the overall wisdom of any particular infrastructure or other project; it is simply to make recommendations back to the body proposing the expropriation.

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Under our proposed changes, this function will be moved to the new Ontario Land Tribunal. Tribunal adjudicators, appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council following a competitive and merit-based process, will be assigned to conduct hearings as necessary. This process will allow for more flexibility and better access to justice for homeowners, as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Ms. Jane McKenna: Speaker, I've heard from many constituents in my own riding and from across Ontario, and they are thrilled that our government is taking action and increasing access to justice in French. These are long-overdue changes that were simply not made by the previous government, which left many francophone Ontarians with fewer rights than English-speaking Ontarians.

Can my friend please provide some more insight on the proposed changes to this bill that expand access to justice in French and how they will impact the Franco-Ontarian population?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I would like to thank my colleague for that excellent question.

It was a moment of pride for me to be able to stand here and deliver my speech in French today. My parents don't speak French, and we immigrated to Canada when I was a year old. Initially, we were in Montreal, and my father couldn't find work because he couldn't speak French, so he moved to Toronto and brought his family here because he speaks English. But he said to my mom that he never wanted his children to not have that opportunity—by not being able to speak French. So that's why they put me and my sister in French immersion. They worked hard to make sure that we could speak, read and write French, because it is critical. It is a part of our culture. It's a part of our history.

The proposed changes in this legislation would expand and guarantee the ability of francophones to file documents in French, access justice in French and make it accessible to everyone, because French is an important part of our culture.

I'm proud to be part of a government that supports Franco-Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Questions?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Speaker, I don't want you to fall off your chair, but I want to congratulate the government

for finally making it easier for the francophone community to access justice in their own language. This is an improvement. It's many, many years overdue. I want to thank the Attorney General for correcting the years of Liberal neglect in this regard—as I say, long, long overdue.

In legal aid circles, there are rumours out there that the government, in merging tribunals, is going to get rid of the Social Benefits Tribunal. It has caused great concern. I'd like it on the record today, if someone over there could give us assurance, that the government has no intention of eliminating the Social Benefits Tribunal in this province.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Madam Speaker, if the member is referring to rumours, I can't really comment on rumours or hypotheticals.

But what I can say is that this legislation is accessing and streamlining access to justice.

Having been a lawyer myself previously and having represented not just landlords but tenants, as well, at the landlord and tenant tribunal—sometimes it's scary for them. There are so many processes and so many procedures, and oftentimes they can't even get the answer to the question until they actually go there in person.

I know the member before me was speaking about how the Internet is not helpful for people who might not have a phone or a computer or access to Internet, but the reality is that we are not taking the in-person access away. We are giving people the right to choose.

Oftentimes, if you are working two jobs, you don't have time to take an hour off, go to the tribunal and pick up an information package. What you do have time for is taking a quick break and looking online—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. *Interjection.*

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you.

I'm just going to remind the members that when I say thank you the first time, that means your time is up. If I have to say it twice, then there may be trouble.

Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to join the debate today on Bill 245, Accelerating Access to Justice Act. We've been fairly clear in our opposition to schedules contained within this piece of legislation. I think I'm in my ninth year here, and I still don't understand why the government would craft a piece of legislation with some good parts in it but then squeeze us on pieces of schedules that are contained within Bill 245 which actually run counter to the goals of improving access to justice in Ontario.

We're in agreement that there is a huge crisis of access to justice in the province of Ontario.

I have a very good friend who has been waiting for her day in court for four years, on an assault charge, and I can tell you that real damage happens as people wait for justice in Ontario.

We agree on a couple of pieces of Bill 245, but we cannot support a so-called accelerating-access-to-justice bill without addressing the increased need of legal aid.

I think that COVID-19 has highlighted and exacerbated the inequities from a racial perspective and from a justice

perspective across this province. We have seen that as this pandemic has rolled out.

The bill also, unfortunately, makes it easier for the government to politicize the appointment of judges. You must acknowledge that there are some serious trust issues with this government. Bringing partisan appointments to the fore is not a way that you build trust in the justice system.

This bill also eliminates a critical appeal option for the environment and natural resources statutes, undermining the public interest. The government is once again sneering at the Environmental Bill of Rights, a piece of legislation that the government has run counter to since coming into power for the last two and a half years.

I can tell you that the people of Waterloo region care deeply about the environment and about water quality, and about aggregate pits like the Hallman pit, for instance, and there's a groundswell of support against this government, because the process that is in place undermines the integrity of the citizens who are fighting for progressive planning principles and for a process that is open and transparent.

People will rise up. If you look at what happened in Stratford, Ontario—they raised their voices. They put political pressure on their local municipal council, around the MZO for a glass company from China, and that community has some healing to do.

When decisions and processes around environmental planning are undermined and are not open and transparent where democratic involvement happens, the real damage does happen.

We would have preferred that the government brought forward a piece of legislation that addressed the desperate need for legal aid in Ontario. We would have preferred that the government approach Bill 245 from an equity lens instead of from a position of privilege. You must not ever confuse your position with real power if you are preventing the people we serve from accessing justice—because that's ultimately what's at stake here.

There is a letter from my community on the Attorney General's desk around legal aid support and the negative impact it is having on our health care system, on our justice system, on our economy. That letter is well documented. It's well researched.

When you get legal aid wrong and put up barriers for people to access justice, we all pay the price as a society.

We would also suggest that you make the justice system less politicized.

There's going to be an election in 16 months—it could be a lot sooner; we don't know. But in that 16 months, we have a lot of work to do to get our health care system and our economy back on track.

The final thing that we would have liked to have seen with this piece of legislation is that—we would like you to treat environmental laws like our planet actually depends on them, because it does.

I think the previous speakers have really highlighted how important these issues are for the people of this province.

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The Hallman pit, for instance, in Wilmot: This is an issue that will divide the region as a whole, because you have one segment of the community that wants it even though there are so many aggregate permits in play right now in the province of Ontario. You don't really need another aggregate pit in that location. So the standoff between the municipality and the province of Ontario is coming.

Perhaps, I think, what we see in this bill is what's not in the bill: a well-funded and properly administered legal aid, which is widely seen as the bedrock in terms of access to justice. I'm not sure if members on that side of the House tried to get increased and improved legal aid services put into play. We quoted transcripts this morning from the long-term-care commission. They're behind those closed doors. Sometimes people advocate for improved resources; sometimes they run into a brick wall. I would like to believe that someone on that side of the House said, "What about the 25% of the population in this province who don't have access and privilege to legal recourse?" I would like to believe that that actually was happening on that side of the House.

Specifically, where we see a roadblock to justice is schedule 6. This has to do with the merging of five tribunals into a single tribunal. I'm going to tell you, Mr. Speaker, why this is so concerning for us. Aside from the fact that tribunals adjudicate more matters in Ontario than the courts do—so please remember that—if you were looking at truly addressing the access and the speed that folks can access legal support, then you would be increasing tribunals. You would be resourcing them so they could actually help. Right now, it's over 100,000 people every year going through the tribunal system. So this schedule, schedule 6, is the poison pill, essentially, that you have put in this legislation for us. This schedule is potentially very harmful around access to justice for Ontarians. The bedrock justification for having tribunals is that they are meant to be faster; they are meant to be cheaper; they are more expert than the courts. This schedule is a major step backwards on all three of these grounds for the over 100,000 Ontarians who make use of the tribunal system.

Schedule 6 also provides the tribunal expanded powers, so now you have this single tribunal which is expanded, and they have greater powers to dismiss a matter without a hearing. You cannot say to us on this side of the House that you're improving access to justice by having this all-encompassing part of the legislation which would dismiss a matter without a hearing. That is exactly the opposite of justice.

So schedule 6, for us, is a non-starter, essentially.

Schedule 8, of course, is the part where you've just built privilege right into the legislation. You've done the exact opposite of looking at a problem through an equity lens and then adjusting course accordingly. With the changes, those who interact with the legal aid system or have been rendered marginalized may not benefit from the issue of witnessing of powers of attorney through the means of

audiovisual. I am disappointed that the government says, "Well, 94% of folks have some access. Sometimes they go to a library. Sometimes they have a computer. Sometimes they access WiFi in certain places." But that 6% of the population still matter.

When you are designing and constructing a piece of legislation, why not truly be inclusive? You could have put the schedule 6 in and then also have a measure—maybe it will be in the budget; I don't know. I certainly hope so. It's something that we are going to fight for.

On the whole, the Accelerating Access to Justice Act is misnamed as a piece of legislation, as a starter.

I hope that the government can address some of these issues as they arise through our debate.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the honourable member for the presentation.

Because of the pandemic and because of other issues, certainly issues with the Office of the Children's Lawyer and the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee, who do very important work in the province—they have been affected by COVID-19 and other issues over the years.

So I'd like to know from the member opposite: Would she join us in supporting the Office of the Children's Lawyer and the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee by supporting us in this bill?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Obviously, the member opposite knows me very well. We've served in this House for many years. He knows that I am a huge advocate for the Child Witness Centre and for the alternate courts that support children because they've been traumatized in many ways. The court system, in its proper form, is no place for those children. They need advocates. They need someone to help them navigate that system with empathy and with compassion. This bill does not do that.

What a missed opportunity to support the very good work of centres like the Child Witness Centre, who actually have to fundraise to make sure that children are not re-traumatized by the court system.

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

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

You spoke a little bit about the politicization of the judicial appointments process. As a reminder to this House on the government's track record on that front—we're talking about a government that appointed the Premier's ally Ron Taverner to lead the provincial police, even though he wasn't qualified. They appointed their senior adviser, Jenni Byrne, to a full-time position on the Ontario Energy Board. Ian Todd, the Premier's former tour director, got a \$350,000 gig in Washington. Rueben Devlin got a \$1-million government advisory appointment. And the Premier's family lawyer, Gavin Tighe, got \$667,000 to sit on the Public Accountants Council of the Province of Ontario.

Can you elaborate more on your concerns about the potential politicization of the judicial appointments process, considering this government's track record?

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

Mr. Speaker, I think the member rightly points out that there is a pattern of behaviour here around government appointments. We share the concerns of Peter Russell, who says, “They want a bunch of names so they can look down and find a nice soulmate Tory.” So the concern around patronage appointments continues.

If you were at government agencies last week, you saw a vice-chair appointment to the TFO. When asked what his qualifications were to be vice-chair of that committee, he said that he had a girlfriend who spoke French.

So there are some serious trust issues here with government appointments.

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

Ms. Lindsey Park: I understand that when a bill is very good, the only thing you can do is distract and talk about some other topic.

There haven’t been many private members’ bills brought forward from the opposition on the topic of access to justice; I’ll just note that as they try to say that they are surprised there’s not more in this government legislation.

There are lots of great initiatives, including allowing the virtual witnessing of wills. I’d like to know: Does the opposition support that?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I understand what you’re saying about distracting, because that’s what you try to do with the private members’ bill point.

When an omnibus piece of legislation comes before this House—and the Liberals did this all the time. They would have a couple of modernization pieces; they would have a couple of schedules that we could support; and then they would have something—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Order, please.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I see you’re getting a little sensitive, which is lovely—they would put a couple of pieces in here that we could not support. So why design a piece of legislation like that?

When we talk about environmental justice, health care justice, affordable housing justice, we are talking about justice. We don’t see it as one little micro piece of a piece of legislation. We have a comprehensive lens, an equity lens, on the justice file, and this misses the mark. It’s very unfortunate.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Waterloo for your summary of what you’re concerned about with Bill 245. I also have some concerns, especially around schedule 6.

1530

I do want to get to the headline of the bill, which is “increasing access to justice.” In your opinion, what measures should be in this bill which would increase access to justice for the people of Ontario?

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

We would make the justice system more accessible for everyone, including people who are marginalized, including people who don’t have cellphones and access to WiFi. We would reverse the cuts that were made by this government to legal aid. We would make sure that the justice system is a stand-alone, independent system with integrity, which cannot be politicized.

Tell me why giving the Attorney General the right and the authorization for current and former Attorneys General to be called to the Ontario bar without having to meet law society licensing requirements—and he calls this a perk. What does this have to do with access to justice? Why give the Attorney General that power? How does it serve the people of this province?

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I’d just like to remind everyone here that we are actually in Ontario and not in the United States, and so accusing us of politicizing the judicial appointment system, I think, is very inappropriate, because we have a very rigorous, demanding process. It is a process that members of the bar take incredibly seriously, and we take pride in the fact that our judicial system has always been separate from politics. That is something we have maintained.

In this piece of legislation, we have modernized the judicial appointments process. We have allowed for more candidates to be included in the list that the judicial advisory committee has to present to the Attorney General. The Attorney General does not see who has applied. The Attorney General is not responsible for vetting the candidates.

I remember when I was a lawyer and I was representing people, one of the biggest complaints and one of the biggest concerns courts had was that there weren’t enough judges.

Will the members of the opposition support us to make sure that there is access to justice by ensuring that there are enough judges to fill those vacancies, to make sure that people can represent—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Thank you. The member for Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I’ll tell the member from Carleton: If an individual cannot have access to legal support, legal advice, legal resources, they’re not going to get to the judge. There’s a reason why our jails are filled with folks who are—60% of them at Maplehurst are on remand. They’ve never had their day—in jail. They can’t afford their bond. They can’t afford a lawyer.

If you’re serious about access to justice, then increase the legal aid funding. Make it truly accessible.

You’re talking about judges and appointments and giving former Attorneys General a perk—that they can be called to the bar even though they’re not a lawyer. This has nothing to do with access to justice.

What a missed opportunity—during a pandemic, no less. This is what you bring to the floor of the Legislature? It’s shameful.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you very much, Speaker. It's always great to see you in the chair and to have the opportunity to participate in a small way in this debate.

Many folks in my riding call my office with needs, for help with ODSP, for help with eviction, for help with Ontario Works—many things that we are not able to provide that legal advice. So we turn them to the community legal clinic, which serves over 6,000 Hamiltonians a year.

The cuts that this government put forward to legal aid hurt my community.

Could the member tell me what the effects of the cuts to legal aid did to her community?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much for the question from the member for Hamilton Mountain.

There's a letter right now on the Attorney General's desk from Waterloo legal aid. I met with them. I'm sure some of the other members from Waterloo region have also met with them. They cite a crisis in access to justice. They tell the stories of people having meetings in community areas with no access and of people being lost—losing access to their housing, losing access to their children, losing a job because they cannot afford a lawyer.

You cannot truly address the need of Ontarians to access justice without addressing legal aid; it's just not possible. All of you on that side of the House know this full well, and yet you've brought Bill 245 to the floor of this Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): There isn't time for another question.

Further debate? Further debate?

Mr. Downey has moved second reading of Bill 245, An Act to amend and repeal various statutes, to revoke various regulations and to enact the Ontario Land Tribunal Act, 2021.

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

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

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, unless I receive a deferral slip, the bells will ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): I have received a deferral slip.

"Pursuant to standing order 30(h), I request that the vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 245, An Act to amend and repeal various statutes, to revoke various regulations and to enact the Ontario Land Tribunal Act, 2021, be deferred until deferred votes on Tuesday, March 2, 2021."

Second reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): Orders of the day?

Hon. Paul Calandra: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Lisa Gretzky): There being no further business, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1536.

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Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Phillips, Rod (PC)	Ajax	
Piccini, David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie, du Développement du Nord et des Mines Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa- Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associé délégué au dossier des Petites Entreprises et de la Réduction des formalités administratives Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA) / Ministre associée des Transports (RGT) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
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-présidente: Donna Skelly
Teresa J. Armstrong, Toby Barrett
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto
Randy Hillier, 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
Catherine Fife, Mitzie Hunter
Logan Kanapathi, Sol Mamakwa
David Piccini, Jeremy Roberts
Amarjot Sandhu, 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
Jill Andrew, Robert Bailey
Guy Bourgouin, Stephen Crawford
Goldie Ghamari, Chris Glover
Mike Harris, Sheref Sabawy
Amarjot Sandhu, Mike Schreiner
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Aris Babikian, Gilles Bisson
Will Bouma, Lorne Coe
Wayne Gates, Robin Martin
Norman Miller, Rick Nicholls
Billy Pang, Amanda Simard
Marit Stiles
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Julia Douglas

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lucille Collard
Will Bouma, Lucille Collard
Parm Gill, Daryl Kramp
Natalia Kusendova, Suze Morrison
Lindsey Park, Guratan 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**

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

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
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Jessica Bell, Stephen Blais
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France Gélinas, Christine Hogarth
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**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Bhutilla Karpoche
Deepak Anand, Aris Babikian
Jeff Burch, Amy Fee
Michael Gravelle, Joel Harden
Mike Harris, Christine Hogarth
Belinda C. Karahalios, Bhutilla Karpoche
Natalia Kusendova
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Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations
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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