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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Thursday 4 March 2021

Jeudi 4 mars 2021

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers/Prières.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PIPELINES

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should recognize that pipelines are a safe way of transporting natural resources which are responsible for thousands of jobs in Ontario and call upon the federal government to fight against the closure of line 5.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Calandra has moved government notice of motion number 103. I'll look to the government House leader to lead off the debate.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, I'll be really, really brief on this, only to thank all members who participated in the take-note debate last week, which helped inform the move to a motion today, and to really single out the member from Sarnia–Lambton, who, along with the member for Barrie–Innisfil, led us in the debate last week. It's obviously something that is very important not only to the member for Sarnia–Lambton but to all of us in terms of jobs and economic growth and prosperity, Mr. Speaker. I'm certainly confident that all members of the House will see it the same way and that we will vote as a unanimous voice to really support those who work in the industry, and to recognize the importance of not only line 5, but pipelines as being a safe way of transporting our natural resources.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Speaker, on a point of order: I move that government notice—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Sorry, you have a point of order? Did you say you have a point of order?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I move that government notice of motion 103 be amended as follows:

Delete everything after "House," and replace with the following:

"the Legislative Assembly should recognize that natural resources are responsible for thousands of jobs in Ontario and call upon the federal and provincial governments to protect workers"—I'm waiting for your acknowledgement, Speaker; I can continue?—"and fight against the closure of line 5."

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I haven't got a copy of the proposed amendment, so I'm going to have to get you to send it down.

Mr. Natyshak has moved that government notice of motion 103 be amended as follows:

"Delete everything after 'House,' and replace with the following:

"the Legislative Assembly should recognize that natural resources are responsible for thousands of jobs in Ontario and call upon the federal and provincial governments to protect workers and fight against the closure of line 5."

The member has the floor, and we're now at the amendment to the motion.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate it, and I appreciate that all members of the House saw fit to dedicate time to identifying what is a real and imminent threat to jobs, certainly in the Sarnia region and all across Ontario.

For those tuning in, many may not understand or know the logistics of how energy distribution happens, and specifically crude and liquid natural gas in Ontario. For the vast majority of Ontario, roughly 50% comes through, ultimately, line 5. Line 5 is a 1,000-kilometre stretch of pipeline that starts in Superior, Wisconsin, and runs across about 1,000 kilometres of the Upper Peninsula of Wisconsin and Michigan. It eventually finds its way at Mackinac and through the Straits of Mackinac across to Ontario.

Speaker, that line is 67 years old. It is a feat of engineering, to say the least. But certainly, there have been concerns raised around the integrity of any pipeline, and specifically a pipeline that lies on the bed of the Great Lakes, whereby if there were to be some sort of catastrophe with that line—as we know happens with energy distribution of all facets—it could potentially damage, destroy the drinking water, the source of fresh drinking water for roughly 60 million people that rely on that drinking water in the Great Lakes basin. That's why, as we understand it, the governor of Michigan and some state legislators have proposed changes to energy distribution. We understand that Governor Whitmer has made it a campaign pledge to eliminate immediately line 5: to end it, to cease the lease or easement that is granted to allow that pipeline to cross.

Now, there is conflict that exists at the state level and treaties that exist that allow states and international jurisdictions to share and rely on binational energy distribution. The 1977 treaty on pipelines really sets the rules around who can intervene. We're quite confident on

our side and through discussions with legal experts and energy distribution experts that the intervention at the state level will not be successful. This issue is going to eventually end up tying itself in the courts for a long time, and lawyers will certainly be busy trying to defend their various purposes. But for all intents and purposes, the 1977 treaty stipulates who can intervene, who can interject and who actually has the jurisdiction to decide whether a pipeline such as line 5 shuts down.

Recognizing these challenges and the concerns that folks downstream from the Straits of Mackinac have, Enbridge, who is the owner of the pipeline, have sought and received permits to begin construction on a new tunnel to eventually remove the pipeline that rests on the lake bed and bring it underground some 100 feet under the lake bed, which is quite phenomenal in its design and engineering but also should offer a measure of safety and alleviate a lot of the concerns about potential effects on the environment. We'd welcome that.

0910

I've spoken to representatives from Enbridge. They are committed to making sure that that change happens. They're waiting for all the signals from the state and federal levels in the United States to give them the go-ahead to start that. That will in and of itself create hundreds, potentially thousands, of jobs. And that's what this is all about, Speaker. This is about the jobs that rely on that energy distribution today, and we understand that. New Democrats absolutely understand that an immediate cessation of that pipeline would be detrimental to the jobs not only in the Sarnia region, but also the jobs all the way throughout the corridor up to Ottawa, into Quebec that rely on that. We know that Pearson International Airport is heavily reliant on the jet fuel that ends up there from the refineries in Sarnia.

Speaker, New Democrats have stood here during the take-note debate. We're on the record. We have written. Our leader, Andrea Horwath, has written to the Minister of Natural Resources, Seamus O'Regan, at the federal level, to demand that he and his government immediately act to protect those jobs. We think it's a worthy endeavour on the part of not only this province, but all jurisdictions, because when Ontario is strong, the rest of confederacy is strong.

I heard the Premier say that we need a Team Canada approach on this. I'm asking for us in the Legislature here to not play any games, to try not to make this political. We know that jobs and the workers who work in that industry, who endeavour each and every day—the highly skilled workers—to perform their jobs safely and effectively for their communities, they need us to be united here today. And so we ask that the provincial government understand that workers should be at the heart of this, that the province, as I amended—we put our amendment in; it includes the word “province,” because let's not exclude our efforts here. Let's make sure that we are on the record.

We can't just hope and wish that the federal government does anything. We have to be on the record here. So you'll see that I've added the words “provincial

governments,” including us. We have a responsibility here. Let's stand up today, united. Let's show workers in the energy sector that we understand the precariousness of this current situation, and that we move towards a brighter energy future.

I only have to point members to Enbridge itself, who have diversified their energy holdings to the extent they are one of the largest green energy deliverers, companies that deliver green energy through solar, photovoltaic, wind, geothermal. They have quite an interesting portfolio, and they are committed to reducing their carbon emissions quite drastically. I would even submit that their targets are even more aggressive than this provincial government's targets.

Nevertheless, Speaker, this is about the jobs that are at threat, potentially, with this immediate closure. We understand that as New Democrats, and today we offer our support to protect those jobs. We hope that the government members will see fit to support our reasonable amendments to the motion.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I do appreciate the opportunity to speak to this. I did not have an opportunity during the take-note debate to speak to it. Just given the importance of this, I am appreciative of the opportunity to rise today in the House to do it.

Again, I just want to, because I have time, really thank the member for Sarnia–Lambton and the tremendous work that he has been doing on this file. I know that he has been leading our efforts, along with the associate minister and the other members of provincial Parliament, in that area, working across national borders, frankly, with colleagues on the American side as well, to really highlight how important this line 5 is to the province of Ontario, not only to our province but obviously to Michigan and the United States as well.

I think we all agree on all sides of the House that this is an important piece of infrastructure in terms of the jobs that it maintains, not just in maintaining a pipeline, but all of the jobs that this pipeline helps to create around it. The importance of this pipeline to Ontario's economy was very well documented by all of the members. Frankly, that there is even a consideration right now that this line might be closed down is the reason why we're bringing this motion to the floor of the House, following a very robust take-note debate on it.

Given the results of the take-not debate, or what we heard from the take-note debate, I don't think there is any ambiguity in the province of Ontario's position with respect to line 5. I hope all members will join us in voting in favour of the motion that the government put forward.

Just briefly, to speak to the member opposite and the amendment that the member has offered, the amendment, I think, puts a little bit of confusion into the mix. We're trying to not be confusing on this. We believe that line 5 is important. We believe it's important to the economy of the province of Ontario. We believe it's important to Canadian workers. When you look at all of the things that

line 5 has allowed the province of Ontario to do and accomplish over the years, it is astounding. But that should be recognized in a very clear and simple motion, which is what the government has offered—a motion that all members should be able to support without delay, frankly.

If you believe that line 5 is important—and the member opposite said that he does; we heard from other members that they believe that line 5 is important—then it must stand to reason that it is a safe way of transporting our natural resources. This is where there is some trouble with the amendment offered by the member opposite. The member opposite, in his amended motion, removes the wording that recognizes pipelines as a safe way of transporting our natural resources, which is somewhat troubling following the words that the member said in this debate just moments ago. It could be construed that some of what he said—and I don't take away from the member that this is important to his region. He personally believes strongly in the importance of line 5; I agree with the member and I appreciate that he believes that, that he believes in the importance of the jobs that come with it. But you can't have it both ways.

This is a pipeline that has serviced the province of Ontario for many years safely. So, to remove that from this motion would seem to suggest that that is not something that we, as a House, believe to be the case, which I think strengthens an argument that, perhaps, is being used south of the border. I don't think that we can show any ambiguity in this particular debate. Pipelines have proven to be very safe in distributing natural resources in the province of Ontario, and that is why it is in the motion that the government has put forward.

The motion put forward by the government follows very closely what we heard in the take-note debate in this House. Members had an opportunity over—I believe a take-note debate is about four and a half hours' worth of debate. Many of the members, at least on this side of the House and some on the opposite side of the House, participated in that debate. What we heard is that, not only this pipeline—and if I can extrapolate, all pipelines. I did hear in some of the take-note debate how pipelines are favourable to train transportation or truck transportation when it comes to bringing natural resources around the province.

But on this particular item, on line 5, I believe, Madam Speaker, that we have to show a very strong resolution together as a chamber. We are under threat. The closure of this particular piece of infrastructure would have such a dramatic effect on the province of Ontario. Let's take away the impacts on the Americans, on Michigan; they can deal with that in their state Legislature. But thinking of what the closure of this pipeline would do for our economy is simply staggering. Thousands of jobs would be not just put at risk, but lost, if we show any wavering on how important this infrastructure is.

0920

It has been talked about: the support of Pearson airport and the billions of dollars of economic activity that results in having Pearson airport and our manufacturing sector.

Again, taking away the people who service pipelines—forget about those jobs for just a moment; we'll get back to them, because they're so critical, but forgetting those jobs for just a moment—there are millions of jobs that are supported because of this pipeline, and we cannot leave an opening, Madam Speaker. That's why I'm being very clear today that I will not support the amended motion, because I don't believe that we as a House should allow an opening for anybody to suggest that this has not been and is not going to continue to be a safe pipeline. It is. The pipelines that we have in this country are safe. The way we regulate pipelines in the country is second to none.

We should be proud of what we have accomplished, whether you agree with fossil fuels or not. It's not the case. That's off the table for now. Whether you agree with it or not, we should be proud of the fact that, despite the fact of our disagreements in how we use fossil fuels and how we use our natural resources, together this country has been able to come up with a distribution method that is safe and has been safe for generations. I would argue that we haven't done enough of it, that by relying on other ways to distribute our natural resources we have let Canadians down. We've left billions of dollars in economic activity and taken it off the table, because we are unable to expand the safe use of pipelines. But that's a debate for another day, Madam Speaker. It's a debate for another day, but I think it is an important debate.

Just to focus again on this: I really sincerely want to say to the honourable gentleman that I think we are all in agreement. If I'm wrong, he can point-of-order me and I won't be upset by it. I think we're in agreement that line 5 is important. I think we're in agreement that line 5 is responsible for thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of economic activity. But we have to be in agreement that it is a safe pipeline, and we have to recognize that it is safe. We cannot open the door for anybody to suggest otherwise. By amending the motion, it shows to those who might have a different belief that there is an avenue, that we are in disagreement, and that cannot be allowed to happen on something that is so very important. I want to let the honourable gentleman know that no, we will not be supporting the amended motion, and that is why we won't be supporting the amended motion.

Having said that, Madam Speaker, I just wanted to briefly, if I can, just because I do have some time—I heard a lot of the words of the member for Sarnia-Lambton. Look, when we started hearing about this, I think a lot of us just thought that this is something that could not happen, that this is something that would fade away, that more logical minds would come to the table and we would move forward with preserving and protecting something that has been so critical to both sides of the border. But as we started to go down a road, it was the member for Sarnia-Lambton, supported by other members in this House who represent that area—it's going to sound self-serving, but I would encourage all Ontarians to really go back. If you want to see how good your legislators are, go back to that debate that was held in this House, the take-note debate, and listen to the speeches of the members on

both sides of the House as to why this is so important, why we are bringing this forward today and hopefully bringing it to a vote today so that we can show the entire country—not only the entire country; the federal government, our friends to the south. Give them the support that they need.

I know the member for Sarnia–Lambton and other members have been meeting with legislators in Michigan and also from the US Congress, both the Senate and the House of Representatives. They need our support on this, and it cannot be a wavering support. So I'm hoping we can bring this debate to a close today, we can get to a vote after question period today and that by noon, we can show the federal government and all of our friends that Ontario is unified in how important this line is to us.

I understand what the honourable gentleman is saying, but the best way that we can show that we're unified on line 5 is a resolution of this House, by passing the motion as it was tabled and having that out and into the federal government's hands and into our partners' hands before noon today—seizing on what happened during the take-note debate, seizing on the work done by the member for Sarnia–Lambton and all of the other members, like the Associate Minister of Energy, who have all been working so hard on this file, and to an extent, some of the members opposite, to whom this is important.

Look, not all of us have, perhaps, an appreciation or understanding of how important pipelines and natural resources are. Some of us are further away from the direct jobs that are a result of it. But as we start to learn how important it is to us, I think then—a lot of that education has come from our side, at least from the members who are directly impacted by it. The member from Chatham–Kent–Leamington: I think of the enormous industry that has come around with greenhouses in the member's area, and farmers in my riding who talk about the importance of this pipeline for them.

The more people started to hear about this, the more we started to get indications of just how important it was to the province of Ontario, and the more we started to become seized by this. As I said, we can have the debate on natural resources and how to distribute them and the value of pipelines. We can have the debate on alternative energies and moving Ontario's economy in other directions. I think we started to do that—not in other directions, but recognizing the importance of alternative energies. We have started to do that.

We started to fix some of the disastrous programs by the previous government, which I think diverted people's minds and attention away from the value and importance of alternative energies because of the way they did the programs, which were so poorly designed. We're seeing in Ontario, in Oakville, the move to building electric vehicles. We can do that at the same time as we understand and value natural resources. You cannot have electric vehicles without the resources that are required to make batteries for electric vehicles. So much of the new economy is based on the resources we have right here in the province of Ontario.

When I look at pipelines in particular, when I look at the Great Recession of 2008, it was on the backs of our

natural resources that our economy and this country were able to rebound so quickly. It was because of the value of those resources that were coming out of Alberta, that were coming out of Saskatchewan, that allowed the rest of the country and the billions and billions of dollars that flowed into all other provinces because of the wealth that was generated and the jobs that were created—not only in Alberta and Saskatchewan, but in Newfoundland and the jobs that were being created by offshore oil there—and the movement of Ontarians and Canadians around this country to help support the billions of dollars in economic activities that resulted from our natural resources, which I will say are safe in comparison to every other jurisdiction.

We should be proud of what we have done to regulate these industries. Is there anything that we should do better, Madam Speaker? The fact that we are still in a country that is so rich, that is so blessed with so many natural resources, but many parts of our country have to import oil from places like Saudi Arabia whilst we have safe resources from our western provinces—I think if there's any failing of the federation, it has been that. That is why, right now, we have to send a very, very clear message on line 5—a very clear message—and a clear message to the other provinces that this is important to us, that this is important to our economy, and a message to our friends down south that this is important to us, that we are not wavering on this, that we will continue to fight as a province for it. All of us will continue to fight as a province for it.

0930

I have no doubt that we will have many very vibrant debates in this place on energy policy and on natural resources, and we will have differences of opinions on how they should be used or where the economy should go, but we are always of the same mindset, no matter what side of the House that you're on, that we want an economy that grows, an economy that gives us the resources to pay for health care, to pay for long-term care, to pay for education, and to pay for roads, transit, transportation. We all agree on that. We disagree on how we get there, often, but we all agree on that.

We are all in agreement on line 5. There is no doubt; we are all in agreement on line 5.

If there has ever been an easier way to show how important this is to all of us in this Legislature, to the people that we represent, it is to show unambiguous, clear support for the motion as we tabled this morning, without amendment. I respect the member opposite but I cannot support, and I am very confident that the members on this side of the House cannot support, the exclusion of the safety of the pipeline, as the member would like us to have in his amended motion.

With that, I move that the amendment be amended by deleting the last period and adding at the end: “, recognizing that pipelines are the safest way of transporting energy resources.”

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize that Mr. Calandra has moved an amendment to the amendment so that it would read:

“Delete everything after the word ‘House’ and replace with the following:

“the Legislative Assembly should recognize that natural”—just a moment—“by deleting the last period and adding at the end”—you’re making me work for it today.

Okay, “the Legislative Assembly should recognize that natural resources are responsible for thousands of jobs in Ontario and call upon the federal and provincial governments to protect workers and fight against the closure of line 5, recognizing that pipelines are the safest way of transporting energy resources.” Have I read that correctly?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I’m just clarifying, because I’m trying to follow the government House leader. Did I read it as written?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that it be amended by deleting the last period and adding at the end: “, recognizing that pipelines are the safest way of transporting energy resources.”

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): That is what I read. That is what I have here. Thank you—just to be sure.

Okay, so that is the amendment to the amendment, as moved by the government House leader. Debate on the amendment to the amendment to the original motion?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It’s a pleasure to rise today, though it’s a bit frustrating listening to this debate because I believe, if the government was serious about having a Team Ontario and a Team Canada approach, given what I heard during the take-note debate, we could have written a resolution together before we came into this House; much in the same way that, a year ago at this time when the COVID pandemic was first striking, we all worked together on some unprecedented unanimous consent motions, which I didn’t always 100% agree with but that I got behind because it was the right thing to do for Ontario. We could have done the same thing with this motion. Unfortunately, that type of working together hasn’t taken place, and you can see by just even the confusion we’re having around the wordings of different motions here that it’s literally happening in—

Interjection: There’s no confusion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The House will come to order. The member for Kitchener–Conestoga will come to order.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: My time’s limited, so don’t heckle me too much.

Speaker, I talked about a way that we could, I think, strategically negotiate on line 5 during the take-note debate. There are two key components of that: One is recognizing the legitimate concerns that the state of Michigan has. The members opposite want to say “pipelines, pipelines, pipelines.” Well, the bottom line is, line 5 is a 65-year-old pipeline that was designed for a 50-year life span. Luckily, it has not had a spill in the Great Lakes, but since 1968, it’s had 11 spills during the course of the pipeline. So if it did spill in the Great Lakes, that would be

catastrophic economically for the millions of people who depend on the Great Lakes for their jobs and the billions of dollars it contributes not only to Ontario’s GDP but obviously our neighbour’s GDP. We should be talking about what we are going to do to ensure the safety of this pipeline.

Let’s not forget that a decade ago, Enbridge’s line 6B spilled into the Kalamazoo River, shutting down river transport and the use of the river for over two years, taking five years to clean it up, and it still isn’t even fully cleaned up, at a cost of well over \$1 billion. The precautionary principle alone says we should be working together to figure out a way to promote safety. I think we could come up with a way to talk about that if we had actually not been wanting to play pipeline politics with this—

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

Hon. Bill Walker: It’s truly a pleasure after last week’s debate. I want to first and foremost acknowledge my colleague from Sarnia–Lambton. He has stood every day on this matter, being a champion in advocating for the continued jobs and prosperity, not only of the people of his community but our great province and across our country.

Speaker, it’s interesting that, again, the leader of the Green Party, the member from Guelph, wants to continually try to pretend in this House that he has the higher degree here, that he has the higher principles. Where was his precautionary principle a number of months ago to come across and actually bring some solid resolution to how to do this? He’s prepared to let 23,000 jobs go in a couple of months, but he wants to stand on the morals and preach to us.

At the end of the day, Madam Speaker, he could have been much more proactive, and at any time. I don’t believe—and I’ll stand to be corrected—that even since last Thursday he has brought anything across to our House leader or to me, as the energy minister, to say, “Here’s what I would do on this matter.” It’s great to stand in here, and he talks about not being partisan, he talks about all the rhetoric, but where is all of his precautionary principle of actually bringing true, legitimate ways that we can actually improve this so that we can secure the safety of the pipeline and the supply of propane, natural gas, petroleum for our jets at Pearson to be able to move goods, cargo and services—things that could be life-saving, that will be shut down in May if he has his way.

I, again, want to stand here at every opportunity and welcome him to come across. He has never once called me or Minister Rickford, that I am aware of, on this issue. He never gave us a heads-up. You would think that he would stand up for the people of Ontario and the people of Canada, especially as the leader of the Green Party, Madam Speaker.

So it’s great that he wants to come in here and tell us that we’re not doing it, that we’re not prepared to work together, but I want to challenge him right today. The member of the Green Party knows my door is open. He’s come to me on other issues, so why is this one—he’s prepared to shut down a pipeline that provides so many

absolutely critical factors to our world—to our health care facilities, to our food supply, to our energy, so that we have the ability to continue to power things like our hospitals and our long-term-care facilities. He's prepared, in the blink of an eye, on what I'm going to suggest actually is partisan rhetoric, to shut that down in May of 2021. We are just debating that today, Madam Speaker, but he is prepared to say, "Sorry about your luck. Just fix this tomorrow."

0940

None of us on this side are arguing that we don't have to make changes to our environmental practices and the things that we're going to do. Fossil fuels, at some point, we truly hope—on this side, we're looking at things like hydrogen. We're looking at things like nuclear. Again, I'm not certain whether he'll stand today and say that he is fully supportive of what we're doing in nuclear in ensuring that we have a future of nuclear, to be sustainable in our economy.

At the end of the day, you would hope, as the leader of a full party, that he's not prepared to play this rhetorical game and say, "We'll shut it down," without the thought, "What's going to replace it in May?" What's going to replace the ability to fire all of those homes and those long-term-care facilities for our most vulnerable? What has he got in his back pocket that he hadn't shared in the debate the other day that he's going to replace all those resources with, Madam Speaker?

I stand very much in line with our friend from Sarnia–Lambton, who has been an absolute champion every single day on this. He has promoted that we should be Team Canada, that every single party of government should be working collaboratively to ensure that we're going back to the United States and saying, "Do not make this error, because it's going to impact the United States as much as it will us."

I'm going to go even a little higher level. The President of the United States wants to do a lot of great things, and that's admirable. But he's going to need a lot of our natural resources to carry out any of those plans. I'm going to specify the electric batteries. There's no way those batteries all become a reality if we don't take the natural resources out of the ground here in Canada. If we don't have the energy to drive that, how do we get there?

All of this talk, again, that the member of the Green Party, the member from Guelph, wants to give us this lecture in the Legislature on why we're not prepared to work with him—I'm going to challenge him again to step up, to come across the aisle and actually bring support to what we are trying to do as Team Canada and ensure that we actually help both our American friends and cousins and allies and the great people of Ontario—particularly the Ontarians—and across our great country, to ensure we have a safe supply of energy and we are going to continue to always have the ability to move forward there.

It's really interesting that many members of this House were almost like crickets on this debate. There was virtually not a single member of the independents, not a single member of the Liberals who stood to speak to this—

very, very few. I don't know if there were even two of the NDP, the official opposition, who spoke to this, to the original take-note debate.

Again, I find that it's very interesting that the Leader of the Opposition, the member from Hamilton Centre, actually said that it wasn't appropriate. It wasn't appropriate for Ontario to be at the table to talk about line 5—something as critical as the secure and safe supply of energy resources, Madam Speaker. She had the audacity to tell us that we should not be at the table.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Shameful.

Hon. Bill Walker: That's absolutely shameful, says my friend from Huron–Bruce.

Madam Speaker, at the end of the day, we need to ensure that we are here and getting—and I will agree on this point with the member from Guelph: that partisanship has no ability to be in this House for these types of issues. We need to ensure that we're all standing in unanimous support of the people of Ontario, that we stand in unanimous support.

Interjection.

Hon. Bill Walker: He's trying to yell out something to me now. I wish he had come earlier so we could have locked those hands, like he always talks about and says that he wants to do that.

I'm going to give him the opportunity now to retract what he said. He's going to say that he stands in solidarity with the people of Ontario, that he stands behind those jobs. And I hope the members of the NDP, the Leader of the Opposition, will actually stand behind us and support the people of Ontario, the people of Quebec and the people of Alberta.

This whole country is going to suffer if line 5 gets shuttered in May without any backup, without alternative resources to replace that critical energy infrastructure that we have to have to power our businesses, to power our homes, to power our long-term-care facilities and our hospitals.

I would hope that the member from Guelph—and I'm really focused on him because I like him. I think he has the ability to come across and do the right thing here, and probably come across and have a chat with the member from Sarnia–Lambton, who has been an absolute champion on this issue and has actually gone out to things like the chambers of commerce, to all of the trade organizations.

I just want to remind all the members opposite: Those trades unions are all behind us on this. They're with us, locked in arm, to say, "We care about the jobs of our families. We care about the future of our children and grandchildren." So at the end of the day, again, I offer it to him and I offer it to every single member of the official opposition, the independents and Liberals to step up and say, "We're with you, Ontario. We're with you, Canada."

We will fight this absolutely every step of the way, to ensure that something that isn't a rhetorical thought process, that actually is someone who says, "We're going to do this with no thought process toward all the critical impediments, all the critical damage they're going to do,

to ensure that we actually have a solid, safe supply of energy”—I just can't get through my head why they wouldn't be wanting to work with us, why they wouldn't have come since last Thursday's take-note debate and said, “Here's what I'd like to do to step up and show you that I support the people of Ontario equally, as you do in your party.”

Again, this isn't about politics on our side; this is about doing what's right for the people of Ontario. This is doing what's right for the people who actually had to pay a mortgage, who have to buy groceries, who are trying to put money away for their kids and, frankly, get through the COVID-19 pandemic. I can't fathom those people that are sitting down in Sarnia and the other 23,000 jobs, worrying what happens in May. How are they going to get through not only COVID, but the rest of their history, without a job, without having the certainty and the ability to know that they're taking care of their family and their loved ones?

I find it unconscionable that the people on the opposite side have not stepped up and said, “I'm with you, 100%.” I'm offering all of them an opportunity today to join in this motion and say, “Yes, we're with you, Ontario. We're with those families. We're with those good-paying union trades jobs,” and say, “I'm with you 100%.” Because if not, Madam Speaker, what they're saying is, “I'm not with you. I'm not with you to support your grandchildren and your children. I'm not with you to support health care. I'm not with you to support good-paying jobs, the economy and getting out of COVID-19, the most horrific thing any of us have probably experienced in our lives”—so today I want to offer that opportunity.

It's great to have this debate. It's great to have legislation on this floor, to truly debate something as critical not just to Ontario, but to our whole country. This could shut down the automotive supply sector in the United States, which will have a crippling effect all over the place. It will have a crippling effect on our supply chains. It will have a crippling effect on the ability to run any of our businesses, if we don't have a secure, steady supply of fuel and power.

So again, I'm really not certain what the opposition to this is or why they would stand so strongly, unless it's just rhetorical and we want the 30-second headline in the paper with no detail. So again, I'm going to ask very directly to the member from Guelph: What is your alternative in May? What are you going to put on the table? I know you're not in power—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm interrupting the member. I apologize for interrupting you when you were on a roll. All of your remarks will indeed, unfortunately, be directed to and through the Chair, not across the floor, not to the member. You can ask those questions through the Chair. Just a reminder to the Associate Minister of Energy. Please continue.

Hon. Bill Walker: My apologies. Madam Speaker, you do a fabulous job of keeping guys like me in line, and I truly appreciate it, because do you know what? We do get passionate when you're talking about shutting down the

people of Ontario and their livelihoods. So I get passionate. I fully apologize for my error; I don't apologize for the passion.

So I will ask through you, Madam Speaker, to the member from Guelph: What is the alternative going to be in May, when you're prepared to shut this down? What are you going to say to those 23,000 family members who, again, are going to be impacted with their jobs and with the reality of all of the businesses that are going to shut down, all of the things that aren't going to happen as a result of this?

And, frankly, I know he has some passion for his American cousins. I think there's some real long-standing history on that American side. I can't fathom that he's prepared to throw them off the dock either and say, “Sorry about your luck, but I'm going to get a good headline today, and I'm going stand up and say that we can do this in good conscience, without any thought process to what we do to back it up.”

Madam Speaker, I have another nine minutes of passion left in me, but I know at this point that I believe we've got other business to go to. I am going to withdraw, other than to say that I hope—through you, Madam Speaker, I'd like to ask every single person in this House: Are you prepared to stand with Ontarians? Are you prepared to be part of Team Canada and fight every single day for the reliance of line 5?

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

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order, please.

Mr. Calandra has moved the following amendment to the amendment to government notice of motion number 103, a resolution respecting pipelines.

The amendment to the amendment reads as follows:

“Delete everything after ‘House’ and replace with the following:

“the Legislative Assembly should recognize that natural resources are responsible for thousands of jobs in Ontario and call upon the federal and provincial governments to protect workers and fight against the closure of line 5, recognizing that pipelines are the safest way of transporting energy resources.”

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 of those opposed to the motion will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until after question period today.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Orders of the day?

Hon. Paul Calandra: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): There being no further business, this House stands in recess until 10:15.

The House recessed from 0951 to 1015.

REPORT, FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Before I invite the members to make their statements, I beg to inform the House that the following document has been tabled: A report entitled Housing and Homelessness Programs in Ontario, from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: In the few weeks I've served as the Ontario NDP's critic for government services and consumer protection, I've heard countless stories about lives ruined because of Tarion's neglect in protecting consumers.

Daniel Browne-Emery, whom we tragically lost on January 1 of this year, is one of them. When Dan purchased a new house in 2007, it came with a government-backed warranty, protection consumers should be able to trust and depend upon. Dan's nightmare began when the house's foundation leaked. Black mould became a constant enemy. Dan tried to get help again and again from Tarion, but he was ignored. With massive black mould patches, standing water in his basement and Tarion not fulfilling its mandate, Dan's bank refused to renew his mortgage. He lost over \$270,000 and ended up homeless.

Why was this consumer not protected? How could this happen in Ontario?

Only after possible public shaming did Tarion offer Dan a paltry sum, forcing him to sign a nondisclosure agreement to hide their neglect.

Dan's story is far too common in Ontario, Speaker. I'm here to remind this government that it's their own agency's job, Tarion's, to protect consumers like Dan, not work for big developers and builders. Consumers deserve authentic oversight and someone who is there for them on the worst days of their lives.

Although Dan can no longer raise his voice, I will continue to champion the rights of consumers so that Dan's tragic story is never repeated again.

ROTARY CLUB OF MILTON

Mr. Parm Gill: It's an honour to rise today and recognize the Milton Rotary Club. As we all know, Rotary members are dedicated volunteers who provide humanitarian services in communities throughout Ontario and worldwide.

On Saturday, April 10, the Rotary Club in Milton and other local partners like Sustainable Milton will be hosting a virtual Milton youth summit. This is their first youth summit, and we would love to see this become an annual event going forward.

With the theme of this event being "Be Tomorrow's Leaders Today," this free program for youth aged 12 to 14 will offer leadership skills development and mentorship, as well as offer awareness of community service and environmental education. Those interested are strongly encouraged to sign up through the Milton Rotary website.

As a proud father of three, I know how important it is to support our youth. I thank all the Rotarians in Milton, and other local key partners, for their tremendous work in our community each and every day.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Suze Morrison: I rise this morning to share a story of my constituent Mouloud and his family.

Fifteen years ago, Mouloud and his wife Roumeila moved into a one-bedroom apartment with the support of a rent subsidy. They were happy. The apartment that they were placed in met their needs, and they started their life together as a young couple.

But fast forward to today and they are still in that same one-bedroom apartment, only now they have three children between the ages of three and seven. Their eldest has ADHD and is truly struggling to have his needs met in this small apartment. The family was already struggling before COVID-19 hit, and obviously, as you can imagine, with the whole family now at home, the situation is becoming really unsustainable.

Mouloud has done everything he can to advocate for his family, but has been told that the wait-list to move to a larger unit is 12 years long.

1020

Mouloud's family needs a larger apartment to accommodate this young couple and their three children, and 12 years is far too long for them to wait. Their eldest child will be 19—a legal adult—by the time this underhoused family will be placed in an adequately sized unit. Mouloud and Roumeila have countless friends and neighbours who are in identical situations. We need investments in affordable housing, and we needed them 15 years ago. In what world is a 12-year wait for affordable housing appropriate?

I'm proud to stand with families like Mouloud's and so many others in calling for investments that don't leave families languishing in underhoused units for decades.

MURRAY WHETUNG

Mr. Dave Smith: On October 21, I introduced Bill 220, the Murray Whetung Community Service Award Act. We debated the bill at second reading on October 26, where it received unanimous support from all members present. The bill would create an award honouring Murray Whetung, a Second World War veteran from Curve Lake. The bill would also tell the story to future generations of how Canada mistreated many First Nation veterans, who served four years or more away from their communities and their families.

On the morning of February 26, Mr. Whetung quietly passed away. He was an inspiration to generations of people, not only in the community of Curve Lake but throughout Peterborough county. Although he was a quiet man, he has left a lasting legacy like no other person I've ever known. He always found the good in every situation and could always be seen with a smile.

I have to relay this one story because it makes me chuckle every time I think of it. During the court case that would eventually settle the Williams Treaty, Mr. Whetung spent an entire day testifying. Whenever he was asked a question about his deputation from 20 years earlier, he would go into a monologue about one of his well-known stories, never speaking directly to his deputation. Afterward, he was asked by a family member why he did that. His response was, "Our lawyer told me not to talk about it."

The Crown attorney thought he was senile, when in reality he simply outwitted the crown.

Chi meegwetch, Mr. Whetung.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Sara Singh: Last week, I had the opportunity to attend the provincial advocacy issues forum hosted by the Brampton Board of Trade. We were able to connect with businesses across our city, as I have been able to do, and listen to their concerns. Many of those businesses raised serious concerns about the lack of supports from this provincial government to help them get through COVID-19, Speaker.

It wasn't just at the provincial advocacy issues forum that we heard those concerns echoed. I met with Tracy, from Scented L'air, who creates essential oils in our city. She said she's struggling to ensure that her main street business can continue to operate throughout this pandemic.

It's not just Tracy. It's also Sean from the Knowledge Bookstore, who said that while he had a bump in sales in the summer, now he's seeing a lull in revenues and he's not sure if he's going to be able to sustain his business.

I also heard from Mansharan and Tejbir, who are operating in the taxi and limo industry. They have indicated that they don't even qualify for the small business relief programs put on by this government.

Many businesses are saying that they're not getting the support they need. And it's not just their business that is suffering. These small business owners are the backbone of our local economy. They help contribute to our city. It's not just their business that's suffering; it's actually their livelihoods.

As Tejbir indicates, he still has bills to pay, even if his business is not functioning. That's brokerage fees, GTAA dues and licence fee renewals. Businesses in our community need this government to step up and actually provide them the direct support they need so that they don't lose their livelihoods and their homes.

DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICE WORKERS

FADI EL MASRY

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to say a few words about developmental service workers here in Ontario. There's a lot of talk about personal support workers during this pandemic. Developmental service workers across this province have been there in group homes and in the community, supporting people living with developmental disabilities—the most vulnerable among us.

I just want to say thank you on behalf of everyone in this Legislature and all Ontarians for the work that you've done to keep people safe—the people you serve, the people you care for—in this pandemic. We owe a debt to you, and I want to thank you very much. I also hope that the government will continue the pandemic pay beyond this year and make it permanent for developmental service workers in Ontario.

Speaker, I do want to say thank you and goodbye to a staff member who's been with me actually longer than I've been a member. He worked for me in the constituency office when I worked for Dalton McGuinty. That's Fadi El Masry. He's leaving working with me after nine years. He did have a little hiatus for about a year, but he's been a really big part of our office, a lot of support to me. He's like a son to me, and he helped improve my Arabic, which is very important in Ottawa South.

So, Fadi, shukran.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Mr. Rick Nicholls: As many of you know, I'm from the great riding of Chatham-Kent–Leamington, the greenhouse capital of Ontario, if not North America, where we grow the finest local produce, such as tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, eggplant, mushrooms and the list goes on, so that Ontarians can enjoy this affordable, locally-grown delicious produce in stores across the province.

Now, in order that we can meet the demand for these delicious items, there are thousands of acres of greenhouses, which don't run themselves. They require a large labour force. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, these growers find it very difficult to secure local help. So, with the help of the federal government, who has implemented programs to bring in temporary foreign workers, growing worker demands are being met. Ontario is looking at bringing in 22,000 workers this year. By the end of April, we will expect to have at least half of them here.

As you can imagine, keeping this many workers safe, especially during a pandemic, is a challenge. But today, I would like to acknowledge two of my colleagues, Minister McNaughton, who has ramped up the Ministry of Labour inspections, and Minister Hardeman, who has put many programs and procedures in place. Without the efforts of these two ministries and everyone else, we wouldn't be able to ensure these foreign workers and the communities where they live are being cared for with food, shelter, clothing and being kept safe from the spread of COVID-19. Safety and meeting the growing demand for fresh local produce is critical.

Speaker, personally, I know how much this means to my communities, both from a health and economic perspective. Thank you, growers and workers, for all you continue to do during this unprecedented time of worker shortages and COVID-19.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Wayne Gates: I rise to address the most important issue in Niagara today: access to vaccines. We have not been spared the pain and tragedy that COVID-19 brings to our community. COVID took the lives of nearly 400 people in Niagara, a loved one in our community dying every 3.5 hours at its peak. However, this government diverted life-saving Moderna vaccines from Niagara. To this day, the government will not tell Niagara where those vaccines went.

Just last week, the health minister tried to convince us that Niagara received what it was promised, and the government House leader said, “At no time was Niagara shortchanged of any vaccines.” He followed that by accusing me, public health and front-line health care heroes of “spreading false allegations.”

Speaker, Niagara Health’s medical advisory committee, a group of local doctors, urged in an open letter to the Premier to provide Niagara with their fair share of vaccines. They called for fairness to protect the lives of people in Niagara. Our medical officer of health and that group of local doctors have confirmed that they were told they would receive 5,500 Moderna doses, but on January 5, it was diverted. Still to this day, they don’t know why, or where they went.

We have empty freezers ready for Moderna vaccines. This government may think we will stop asking questions or speaking up if they say we’re getting our fair share of vaccines, but it’s not accurate. We will not be silent.

I continue to stand with our public health medical experts seeking fairness and answers while I’m standing up for my community. Let’s be clear: No matter how this government tries to rewrite history, Niagara did not get its fair share of vaccines, and lives were lost—

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The next member’s statement.

1030

PALLIATIVE CARE

Ms. Lindsey Park: I rise to update the House on the much-anticipated expansion of palliative care services for patients and families in Durham region at Oak Ridges Hospice in Port Perry.

Back in November 2019, I was extremely proud to join the Minister of Health in Port Perry to announce an expanded plan for the first hospice in Durham region, increasing the plan from five beds to an eight-bed hospice. At that time, we also announced an additional \$600,000 in

capital funding to support construction of the additional beds, bringing the capital investment up to \$1.6 million.

Speaker, I have great news: The new 12,500-square-foot, eight-bed facility is finally ready to open this spring.

I want to acknowledge a few people and congratulate Brent Farr, who was recently named executive director, and Michelle Betlem, the new fund development and communications coordinator. For their long-standing contributions, I want to thank Bette Hodgins, the project manager of operations; Dr. Steve Russell, who will now be the first medical director; Dr. Stephen Gray, who will now be board chair; as well as board members Gail Guimond, Kevin Morgan and Dave Sidhu. The hospice will actually be named Morgan and Sidhu House in honour of these legacy donors.

Finally, I want to thank Anne Wright, the capital campaign chair, and the Minister of Health for her unwavering support.

MARKDALE HOSPITAL

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I’m pleased to rise and deliver this statement on behalf of my friend the Associate Minister of Energy and MPP for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, who announced last Friday the construction of the new state-of-the-art hospital in his riding.

He says, “Mr. Speaker, as an advocate for the new Markdale Hospital since the day I was elected, I’m proud to share that this project is fully approved and construction is under way.

“The Ontario government is investing \$53 million to build a modern, four-bed hospital with a 24/7 emergency department, one palliative care bed, and access to clinical laboratory and diagnostic imaging services.

“I thank the local community who has rallied behind this project for 20 long years, while raising over \$7 million in its support.

“I thank the Grey Bruce Health Services and the foundation teams, past and present, for their leadership over the years.

“I also thank Mayor Paul McQueen, and councils, past and present, for their perseverance over the years!

“And finally, I thank my predecessor, Bill Murdoch, who himself advocated for years and, I believe, he had at least two health ministers from the previous government visit Markdale to help promote this project.

“It took two bills and two decades to get the Markdale Hospital project approved. But it was Premier Ford and Minister Elliott who delivered on their promise.

“This is the best news my constituents have been waiting for, and we are extremely excited for the future of health care in our region and look forward to celebrating with the community as soon as it’s safe to do so.”

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

COVID-19 FATALITIES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand the Leader of the Opposition may have a point of order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I have a point of order. I seek unanimous consent for the House to observe a moment of silence to pay tribute to the 98 Ontarians who have succumbed to COVID-19 over the past week.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition is seeking the unanimous consent of the House for the House to observe a moment's silence to pay tribute to the 98 Ontarians who have succumbed to COVID-19 over the past week. Agreed? Agreed. I'll ask the members to rise.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Members may take their seats.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Point of order.

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Thank you, Speaker. I ask for the unanimous consent of this House to bring forward a motion to call on the Conservative government to immediately implement paid sick days to protect workers in Brampton and in Ontario and to ensure that they don't have to choose between going to work sick or paying the bills.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Brampton East is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to bring forward a motion requiring the government to implement paid sick days legislation to help protect workers in Brampton and across Ontario from COVID-19. Agreed? I heard a no.

It is now time for oral questions.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, we know that the AstraZeneca vaccine is arriving any moment now, and as far as we know, the Premier's plan is to vaccinate healthy 60-year-olds before at-risk 70-year-olds. The clock is ticking on AstraZeneca, as we all know, because it has a restricted shelf life.

Does the government plan to vaccinate the most at-risk people in our province or not?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Yes, I can assure the leader of the official opposition that we do have a plan. The plan is available, for anyone who wishes to see it, at ontario.ca/covidvaccines. It sets out the three priorities that we have in terms of the phasing, I should say, of the rollout of the campaign.

First, of course, we wanted to make sure that our most vulnerable residents of long-term-care homes received at least the first dose of the vaccine—and we're working on the second doses. Next, we are prioritizing in terms of age, starting with 80-year-olds and then working with other priority communities—people with disabilities and other health concerns.

The decision that we've received now from NACI indicating that we can delay the Pfizer and Moderna second shots for four months is truly a game-changer. And with AstraZeneca coming online next week, this is going to allow us to get more needles into more arms faster, which is what we need to do to provide everyone in Ontario with a layer of protection against COVID-19.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Still on vaccines: This morning, CTV broke that 1,500 vaccines have been wasted here in Ontario while people wait for a vaccination. That is the equivalent of six retirement homes.

We asked the government for a directive around preventing wastage of the vaccine, but the government refused to provide that directive.

How can it be that 1,500 vaccines have been wasted in our province?

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, we have an amazing group of people who are doing the vaccinations in the province of Ontario, across the entire province. They're doing everything possible. We know now that we can get six doses of the Pfizer and every effort is being made to do that.

However, it's also known that in any vaccination campaign, including in our flu vaccination campaign, there is going to be some degree of waste, as much as we're working hard to prevent that there is no waste whatsoever. What we're talking about is 0.1% waste out of 784,000 shots that have already been given. That means that 99.9% of the people are getting the shots they need. The 0.1% is a very, very, very small percentage of waste. This happens in any vaccine campaign, and it has already been provided for in our plans.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, vaccines are now beginning to arrive regularly, but the government doesn't have a plan to make sure that the most at-risk populations, particularly our COVID-19 heroes, are getting their vaccinations quickly. They have no booking system in place. The vaccines are going to waste.

My question is, why does it always feel like we're in a scramble—like this government is scrambling instead of having a well-thought-out and executed plan?

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

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: It's amazing how the party of doom and gloom—"We have no vaccines." We're leading the country—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Doug Ford: —even if you combine every one. We have 784,000 people who have been vaccinated, and 268,000 have had the double dose. So I'm just not too sure where the Leader of the Opposition is coming from, but obviously there's a little number mix-up that they have.

1040

Again, we've vaccinated more than anyone in the entire country. We're going to continue doing that. As I said

yesterday, Mr. Speaker, let's get more vaccines from the federal government. That's where the blockage is. Once we get more vaccines, you're going to see it ramped up. Oh, by the way, Mr. Speaker, we set another record across Canada: We vaccinated over 30,000 people yesterday.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier. Yesterday, the Premier said it's up to public health units to vaccinate folks in the most at-risk neighbourhoods. So my question is, why is the Premier abandoning our COVID heroes?

Hon. Doug Ford: Actually, there's multiple people that are vaccinating out there. It's the hospitals, it's the PHUs, it's the private sector and it's all the pharmacies. There is going to be a pilot with 500 pharmacies, and we're just going to build on that. There are 4,900 pharmacies within that group, with a lot of independent pharmacies. It's all hands on deck, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I'll repeat what I just said: We need vaccines from the federal government. We don't need these dribs and drabs of 180,000 here and there. We need millions of vaccines. Once we have them, I can assure you we're going to get them out the door. And by the way, the vaccines we just received—I had an update yesterday. We're going to be out right across the province this weekend, so hopefully they're going to ship more vaccines.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the science advisory table clearly has told the government that the best plan is to get those vaccines into the arms of our COVID heroes in the highest-risk neighbourhoods in our province. That would prevent almost 4,000 new cases of COVID-19 and it would save 168 lives. In fact, Dr. Michael Warner said this: He recommended “vaccinating higher-risk populations sooner which will reduce strain on hospitals, open up non-COVID care sooner and save more lives.”

Why, once again, is this Premier ignoring the expert advice?

Hon. Doug Ford: I'm just wondering, is the description of long-term care not “vulnerable”? Because we've basically immunized every single long-term-care patient and the front-line health care workers. We're going to continue doing that, Mr. Speaker.

There is something called “parallel systems,” that you can actually vaccinate people with the AstraZeneca and you can vaccinate people with the Moderna and Pfizer. By all means, if the Leader of the Opposition wants to sit down and get a little schooling on that, I would be more than happy to do that for her.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, here's the Premier's plan: Healthy 60-year-olds are going to get the vaccine before at-risk 70-year-olds, and 50-year-old COVID heroes in high-risk neighbourhoods are waiting who knows how long.

My question is: This government is responsible for the distribution of vaccines in our province. Why are they not providing the public health units enough vaccines to ensure that the at-risk COVID heroes who live in those high-risk neighbourhoods get their vaccines soon?

Hon. Doug Ford: Why aren't we getting the vaccines out? I just mentioned, Mr. Speaker, we don't have the vaccines. But I'll pass that message on to the PM when I speak to him, that we need more vaccines until we can take care of everyone, no matter if they live in Toronto—and our priority will always be the most vulnerable. In congregate living, we're going to do that. We're going to make sure we get the over-eighties-plus and we're going to work our way down, but we're also going to work on making sure we take care of people, the most vulnerable, within our society.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Sara Singh: My question is to the Premier. Ontarians heard this week that the Minister of Health didn't have answers for the long-term-care commission, and she passed the buck over to the Premier, who refuses to appear before the commission to give families in this province the answers they need about the decisions that he made. Ontarians also heard that the long-term-care minister had her own worries about COVID-19 spreading in long-term-care homes, but she did nothing to put in place real substantive measures of precaution that would have protected seniors in long-term care.

The Premier said that there would have been an iron ring in long-term care, yet, Speaker, it's clear that it was never built. Can the Premier help families and seniors understand why your government failed to build the iron ring in long-term care and protect vulnerable seniors in this province?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question from the honourable member. We set out very, very quickly to ensure—even prior to the pandemic, to be honest. Look, we inherited, as I've said on a number of occasions, a long-term-care system that really was in crisis. That's why we moved so quickly after taking over government. The Premier made a commitment to the people of the province of Ontario to build new long-term-care facilities right away. We did that. There was a staffing strategy that was being considered, Mr. Speaker. We've moved MZO—which they're against—to ensure that we could build out long-term-care homes very, very quickly.

It is no secret that we inherited a government that had only built 600 new long-term-care home beds. We moved very, very quickly during this pandemic to ensure that our long-term-care homes had all the resources they needed, including PPE, IPAC support and support from our hospitals.

There is more work to do. That's why the commission is so important. That's why we've moved on the recommendations, Mr. Speaker. I hope the members opposite will support us as we continue this important work.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: Speaker, the testimony from the Minister of Health and the Minister of Long-Term Care makes a few things clear: The buck really stops with the Premier, and he should be the one testifying and clarifying the response to Ontarians.

Today, we also learned from this testimony that the Ontario Hospital Association said that the Premier's own chief of staff actually seems to be the one running the command table. Instead of leaving the operations up to the Chief Medical Officer of Health or other scientists, it seems that the Premier has apparently put his own political appointee in charge.

The Ontario Hospital Association told the commission that they would have preferred that an expert be in charge of leading the pandemic response. Why did the Premier put his own chief of staff in charge, and will he and his chief of staff be appearing before the commission to explain to Ontarians their actions?

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

Hon. Doug Ford: It's ironic that the member is saying that. The chief of staff doesn't even sit on the table, so I'm not too sure where she got that information.

But again, Mr. Speaker, from day one, no matter if it's the Minister of Long-Term Care, the Minister of Health, all the ministers here, we've worked tirelessly every single day, around the clock, sleepless nights, making sure we turn around the long-term-care system that we inherited. Our government has approved \$1.38 billion in surge funding for the sector. We have accelerated four projects to make sure Mississauga, Ajax and a couple in Toronto have brand-new long-term-care systems. We ended up hiring 8,200 PSWs. We're the only jurisdiction in Canada that's going to have four hours of care.

We're improving the broken system we inherited, the system that was broken for 30 years.

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Infrastructure.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the daily lives of all Ontarians. Throughout the pandemic, I have heard from many constituents in Perth–Wellington about poor and unreliable broadband service. It has become abundantly clear that too many people in our province lack reliable Internet or, in some cases, don't have any connectivity at all.

I know our government has stepped up and made historic investments to improve broadband and cellular connectivity for the people and businesses in our province, and I'm excited about the possibilities that will result from these additional investments our government is making. Yet despite the promise that comes from these investments, we often hear the Minister of Infrastructure say that this funding isn't enough and that there is more work to do.

Would the minister please tell us exactly what it will take to close the digital divide?

Hon. Laurie Scott: I'd like to thank the member from Perth–Wellington for the question and for his representation to his constituents.

As he indicated, our government has taken decisive action to help bridge the digital divide. In fact, it was in the fall, four short months ago, that I had the pleasure of hosting the Premier and two of my cabinet colleagues in Minden, Ontario, to announce our government's historic investments in broadband infrastructure. But as members of the House know, broadband is a federally regulated sector. Its agency, the CRTC, is responsible for establishing country-wide standards and rates for Internet and cellular connectivity.

Despite that, Mr. Speaker, our government is not waiting to take action to bridge that digital divide. While we continue to call on the federal government to do its part and properly fund broadband, we are making historic investments to improve and expand broadband and cellular connectivity to communities across the province because, as the member rightly points out, the pandemic has highlighted this need. Frankly, Ontario can't wait for federal action; the digital divide is widening.

1050

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, I received an email from Kim in Mount Forest, who shared her concerns about reliable broadband. Her email reads, "I'm sure you've received many emails in regards to this issue, but something just has to be done. I live in Mount Forest, Ontario, and I can have what can best be described as the world's most horrible Internet.

"For example I was trying to download something from a website, and it took more than eight mins. My download speed is 0.54 megabits/second with an upload speed of 0.01 megabits/second, and if that weren't enough, we're paying \$179 a month for this subpar service.

"It's difficult with two of us trying to work from home and staying connected with family members has been a challenge. It's very frustrating not being able to have this service when a lot of people rely on it."

My question for the minister: When might people like Kim in Mount Forest be able to have reliable high-speed Internet connectivity?

Hon. Laurie Scott: I'd like to thank you for sharing Kim's story with us. I want to say to Kim, I understand where you're coming from. I live in a rural area and experience many of the same difficulties she does.

I understand that for many people across Ontario, there is no infrastructure project that is more important to them and to their local economies than broadband, and that's why we have a plan. That's why, last November, our government announced we are making historic investments to improve Internet connectivity to communities right across the province.

Our investments are just one of the steps we're taking to help deliver broadband to more people across Ontario. While I'm proud that our government has stepped up with

historic levels of funding, we know that it's simply not enough to bring everyone in Ontario up to speed. That's why, this afternoon, I will be introducing legislation in this House that, if passed, will help us bridge the digital divide.

I've said before that we will continue to do what we can to get Ontarians connected. While we continue to call on the federal government to give Ontario its fair share, I can say to the constituents in Ontario that we are going to close that digital divide.

YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM

Ms. Suze Morrison: My question is for the Premier. This week, families of children in 26 youth justice centres, mainly in northern Ontario, learned that their facilities were being immediately closed. Without any notice, children—many of them Indigenous, some of them as young as 12—were put onto planes and buses in the middle of the night and moved out of their communities.

This government hid this decision from those families. Local officials were quoted as saying, "We weren't allowed to tell them they were moving, we weren't allowed to tell their families, we weren't allowed to tell them where they were going."

My question to the Premier is, why does this government care so little about these families? Why did they not think that they were worth telling that their children were being removed into another part of the province?

Interjections.

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

To respond, the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Todd Smith: There are a number of different processes that we followed as we closed these youth justice facilities to make sure that the children were transferred seamlessly to another location in northern Ontario.

A focus on prevention and education programs has led to an 81% reduction of youth admitted to youth justice facilities in the province of Ontario. That's good news. That means there are now 8,500 fewer kids in custody than there were in 2004-05.

As a result of these youth justice facilities being underutilized—and there were five of them that had zero kids in them; there were 13 that had one child in them last year. This is really, really important. It shows the success that we're having in keeping families together and returning youths to the right track, where they become positive members of society.

The decision to close these facilities will end up saving \$40 million annually each year, but at the same time, these children will be getting the services in those communities—

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

Ms. Suze Morrison: Back to the Premier: In response to the Premier's decision to secretly remove children from

their communities in the dead of night, Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler said, "Ontario should be ashamed," and I agree.

What I just heard from the minister is that he has put a dollar amount, a bottom line, on the trauma that he is causing to Indigenous children in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, the provincial child and youth advocate also said, "The way in which these young people were treated like pieces of furniture, with no rights, with no sense that they've already been through trauma, without their families knowing where they're going, to do that in that way is unconscionable." This decision will have a devastating effect on these families.

Premier, in what world is it acceptable to ignore the history of child removal in the province of Ontario, to ignore the history of residential schools, to ignore the history of the Sixties Scoop and the Millennium Scoop and the continued removal of children through the justice system and through CAS? How do you ignore that and not stop and think about the trauma that you are causing these children? Did you not think about—

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

Interjections.

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

Again, the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services to respond.

Hon. Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, there were 10 children who were moved across northwestern Ontario earlier this week, and there are eight facilities that remain open across northern Ontario, many of them providing the culturally appropriate type of services that are required.

In the example of Justice Derek Holder House in Sault Ste. Marie, it had a utilization rate of 2%. There were zero youth in that facility for the majority of the year. Another northern example: There were four youth justice facilities with zero kids for the majority of the year; there were five that had one youth. It just didn't make sense to keep these facilities open.

These are all recommendations that came from an Auditor General's report back in 2012, that required the modernization of the system to ensure that the kids were getting the services they need. But the bottom line: 8,500 fewer kids are in custody now and are getting service in the community, Mr. Speaker, and that's good news.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier. I was glad to hear the Premier say this morning that they were going to prioritize the most vulnerable in the vaccine rollout.

Adults with developmental disabilities, their families, the people who work for them are concerned about whether they're going to get their vaccines. As we all know, many people living with developmental disabilities have comorbidities. They're at a higher likelihood of hospitalization and death. There's a lot of risk for them.

I know that the science table has put forward their recommendations to cabinet and that the minister and the

Solicitor General have both said that that information is coming. It's creating a lot of anxiety for these families. That recommendation came more than 10 days ago. They're afraid that they'll get forgotten again, because it's happened throughout the history in this province. It's something that, in this Legislature, we have to be very aware of.

Minister, when will you be able to provide the information to these families about where they are in priority for vaccinations for their children?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member for this question. It is a very important issue and one that we are paying attention to with the task force on immunization. It is something that we have built into our plan. We have one plan that is being delivered by 34 different public health units.

As we move into phase 2 of the plan, we are going to be focusing on two things, essentially: one is age and one is risk. We've already talked about age in detail: We're starting with people who are over 80 and then moving down in five-year increments. But it's also based on risk, and the risk comes from several areas. One area is going to be people who are living in congregate settings. That would account for some of the people that you're speaking about: people with developmental disabilities who may be living in group homes.

It also will be based on their health risks and their personal situation. That will account for many of the people who are very vulnerable, who do have developmental services issues or physical issues, health issues that require them to be moved up further in the list. This information will—

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

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you, I appreciate the answer, but I can't underscore the level of anxiety with families.

As you know, a 30-year-old with Down's syndrome might be like a 50-year-old who doesn't have Down's syndrome, and they may have comorbidities that complicate that. Dealing with them specifically, as opposed to in a general sense of that population, like we're dealing with the populations here, I think is really important to do. Because if we try to pick them off—they have a comorbidity or they're this old or they live in this setting—I don't think it's going to work.

1100

I raised this when we had the one brief that we had about vaccines. I thought I was heard, but I haven't seen confirmation of that. I think the approach that the government needs to take—and I don't know if that's what the advice is—is we need to look at them as a group, because once we try to pick them off specifically on things, it's going to create some problems for families and we're going to miss people.

I'd ask the minister again to—

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you. This is a group of people that I know has been lost and forgotten in the past. I recall several years ago working on the Select Committee on Developmental Services. This is something that is, I think, very important to both of us personally, and this is a group that we do not intend to dismiss.

We intend to make sure that they do receive that level of priority, because you're right, they often don't reach the same ages as other people in terms of their length of life. I know that people are very anxious about knowing where they are on the list, and we're very anxious to provide them with that certainty. That will be coming imminently.

But I would also say that the information we received from NACI just last night about the fact that we can delay the intervals between the Pfizer and Moderna doses by four months is a game-changer for us in terms of being able to proceed faster with immunizations and have more needles in more arms more quickly. We intend to do just that. As soon as we receive them, they're going to be going into arms as quickly as possible.

PIPELINES

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Last week, I was proud to join colleagues on this side of the Legislature in speaking up for the hard-working people of Sarnia–Lambton and the tens of thousands of people across Ontario who would suffer because of the Michigan governor's decision to shut down the line 5 pipeline. However, it was sad to see only two members opposite take part in this important take-note debate.

Could the Associate Minister of Energy please tell this House why it's so important that this House stand united in the fight to ensure the continued safe operation of line 5?

Hon. Bill Walker: Thank you to my friend the member from Perth–Wellington for this important question and all of his great work.

As the member mentioned, last week, we had an excellent take-note debate in this Legislature on line 5. We heard from colleagues from across the province who shared the grim realities that the people of our province will face if this ill-considered decision stands. We heard quotes from some of the people and businesses in southern Ontario who would lose their livelihoods as a result of the line 5 shutdown.

Earlier that day, I invited opposition colleagues to join us in speaking up for these hard-working Ontarians, including many unionized workers. Unfortunately, I was sad to see that only two members, one from the official opposition and one from the independents, rose to speak to this important issue.

Later today, this Legislature will have an opportunity to demonstrate its support for Ontario jobs, our province's energy sector and, most importantly, the people we represent. I sincerely hope that the opposition and all members will join us in supporting the government's motion on line 5.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Again to the minister—and I want that thank him for that answer—I, too, hope that the opposition will take the opportunity to stand with us in the fight to prevent line 5 from shutting down.

Last week, the leader of the official opposition—and this is quite sad, Speaker—said, “There’s no role, really, for the provincial government” on this issue, and, “This is a federal matter.”

Can the associate minister please tell us how the provincial government is playing an important role in raising awareness of this issue and why this advocacy is so important?

Hon. Bill Walker: Thanks again to the member from Perth–Wellington for that question. Unlike what the leader of the official opposition says, there is absolutely a role for the provincial government in standing up for the hard-working people of Ontario, for our businesses, for our energy sector and our families.

This Premier has been leading that charge. As I mentioned last week, our government continues to engage with our federal partners, with legislators in Michigan with local leaders and mayors, with chambers of commerce, industry leaders and many, many others. Colleagues on this side of the House are taking a Team Canada approach, are calling on our federal MPs to help advocate for this issue and are helping them understand the potential negative impacts on our constituents. We held an important take-note debate and called on the opposition to join us in this effort.

We count on our federal government to help protect Ontario jobs and our province’s energy security. We hope that by working together with the support of all people in this House, we will find a way and a solution to achieve these goals and support the great people of Ontario.

SMALL BUSINESS

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is for the Premier. Darryl owns the Stage Diner, a small business in my riding. He had invested his savings into opening the Stage Diner last spring. Then the pandemic hit. Darryl applied for the Ontario Small Business Support Grant, but he has been denied, because his new diner business couldn’t demonstrate a loss in revenue and there’s no consideration to his previous business.

Small businesses in my riding have done the right thing throughout the pandemic. They have scaled back their operations and followed provincial public health rules. Why has the government failed Darryl and the many other small businesses that still can’t access this support?

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

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you to the member for bringing up Darryl’s situation. I did receive a letter from you yesterday. We are examining this particular case and going through the details now.

But the reality of this grant program is that it has reached the hands of many small businesses throughout this province. In fact, the latest statistics we see are that almost 80,000 small businesses have received \$1.1 billion in hand, and the average wait time to receive those monies is 12 days. This is an incredible support system for small businesses. Of course, there are the case files which are more complex, or perhaps errors are made. That’s why we encourage members opposite, if you have businesses that are unable to access those supports, to feel free to contact us, and we will look into those details for you.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: If Darryl doesn’t get access to the Ontario Small Business Support Grant, he will have to shut his doors. He is already scaling back his hours. He needs the government to reconsider his application, and he’s not the only business that is reaching out for help.

Yesterday, my office heard from two hair salon owners who applied for the grant months ago and have yet to hear back from them, so these are applications sitting on the shelf that nobody has responded to. These businesses have either been closed or at a reduced capacity for almost a year. The ones that have survived are barely holding on.

Can the Premier ensure that every small business that needs the Ontario Small Business Support Grant will receive it?

Mr. Stan Cho: As we look into Darryl’s case, we’re happy to look into the hair salons’ cases as well.

But we are helping small businesses outside of the small business grant program as well. Whether that is help with PPE grants; whether that is help with broadband infrastructure investments; whether that is help in permanently reducing property taxes for up to 30%; whether that is help for eliminating the tax on jobs, the EHT, for the smallest of small businesses in this province, there’s a long list of support measures from the very beginning of this pandemic.

What do they have in common? Two things, Speaker: (1) We’re hearing from small businesses that this is helping them weather this storm that is COVID-19; and (2) the opposition has voted against every single one of those important measures thus far. I hope that changes moving forward, as we table our next budget later this month.

HOMELESSNESS

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is to the Premier. Today, the FAO released its report on housing and homelessness programs in Ontario. The FAO concludes that the province will likely not reach the 2025 goal of ending chronic homelessness.

Nobody should go without a roof over their head or a warm place to keep them safe, especially during the times of COVID. Unfortunately, there’s a significant gap between such ideals and the harsh reality faced by too many Ontarians today. The FAO estimates that 16,000 Ontarians are homeless on any given night, of which between 40%

and 60% are experiencing chronic homelessness—but we really don't know, because this government stopped the count in 2018. Over the past year, the pandemic has put 355,000 Ontarians out of work, the largest decline on record. The eviction moratoriums have expired or are just about to expire at the end of this month.

Will this government recommit to reaching their goal of ending homelessness by 2025 and providing the funding to do it? And will you restart the count, so we know how many people are sleeping on our streets in Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: First of all, I want to thank the Financial Accountability Officer for his work. Our government takes this file very seriously. After years of inaction—Speaker, through you to this member and her previous government—we were saddled with a situation where we had to act. The previous government had a lot of platitudes, but they did not have a plan. Since being elected in June of 2018, we have made this a top priority for our government.

1110

Speaker, I haven't had the chance to ask, through you to this member, if she will join us. However, it's been clear under the National Housing Strategy that we are being shortchanged by the federal government by some \$490 million. I've written to the federal minister about that issue. I know Ontario's 444 municipalities support me on that ask and I would like to make sure, through you, Speaker, that this member supports us in asking for Ontario's fair share.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Housing advocates expect the province to play its role in leadership when it comes to housing and homelessness in this province, and there is much work for you to do.

From 2019-20 to 2027-28, annual spending on the province's housing programs will average \$696 million. This is significantly lower than the average annual spending between 2014-15 and 2018-19, at \$856 million. The investments are going in the wrong direction, Speaker. Only half of the 55,300 additional households that will receive support under the province's housing program in 2027-28 are expected to be removed from the core housing need. The FAO estimates that by 2025 there will be still an estimated 159,800 "high housing need households"—those who are paying more than 50% of income on housing.

Speaker, will the minister reverse his cuts to housing programs and restore the funding to at least 2019 levels—

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

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: Through you to the honourable member: She needs to get her numbers straight. It was clear in the Financial Accountability Officer's report that it acknowledged that some of the federal programs—the cost-shared programs with the province—were decreasing

over time where other new programs were starting, and then the trends would then increase upwardly.

I want to go back to a statement that the member made regarding the homelessness count. The Liberals made a commitment to end homelessness by 2025. The one thing they forgot: They didn't have a plan to do that. This year, we will be implementing a by-name list across the province, which is more effective than the previous haphazard methods that the previous government put forward. We are going to move forward with the by-name count this year. But don't take my word for it: Contact the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. They have worked with many of Ontario's municipalities—many municipalities of members opposite—and realized that the by-name list is the only way—

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

BIRTH CERTIFICATES

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My next question is to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. The birth of a new baby is one of the biggest milestones in a parent's life. Among all the new challenges that new parents face, they also are required out to fill out a flurry of documents. In that process, it is not uncommon for a spelling or auto-correct mistake to occur, resulting in the wrong name registered on a newborn's birth certificate.

In 2018-19, the Ombudsman's annual report highlighted this concern, and it is my understanding that the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services has acted to make the process for correcting those errors easier.

Can the Minister of Government and Consumer Services explain how recent regulatory changes are making it simpler and more affordable to correct an error in the name of their newborn child on a birth registration?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I'd like to thank the member from Perth-Wellington for his question. I know that as proud grandparents, he and his wife, Jane, celebrate the milestone when a new baby enters the Pettapiece family as well.

I'm pleased to share with everyone that we have taken action. Because when that bundle of joy arrives, parents are excited. They go to register the birth of their newborn on their phones and their tablets, and sometimes auto-correct can make small errors. That unintended consequence can be costly and become a bigger problem.

For years, a strict legislative requirement has made it onerous for parents to correct minor errors. For example, they have been required to submit both a statutory declaration and additional evidence if certain criteria are met. To compound this issue, to correct these minor errors parents have had to spend \$90. So I'm pleased to share with this House that I recently signed regulations to make it easier to correct an error on a vital event registration like a birth certificate.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Again to the minister: It's great to hear that the government is making life simpler for new parents at one of the most joyful and hectic times of their lives. This change is yet another step in making government services more accessible for Ontarians.

Speaker, ensuring that Ontarians are able to continue to access critical government services during the pandemic is of utmost importance. This includes, of course, the 5-in-1 Newborn Bundle. Can the Minister of Government and Consumer Services explain the steps her ministry is taking to improve the bundle for new parents and ensure that Ontarians continue to access such critical services from ServiceOntario?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Absolutely. I'd be pleased to share with everyone in the House today and people watching at home that the 5-in-1 Newborn Bundle is one of 40 services available online through serviceontario.ca. From the comfort of your own home, the bundle allows new parents to apply for a birth certificate, a social insurance number, Canada child benefits, including the Ontario Child Benefit and education savings referral service.

Speaker, my ministry has recently made updates to the bundle to ensure that when parents are completing their child's birth registration, they will see their child's proposed legal name multiple times and are able to make corrections along the way when they're certifying the name and the birth of their baby. This is another safeguard that will streamline the process of getting documents for newborns. This bundle is one of the many easy-to-use online ServiceOntario services that are available 24/7. Users can print proof of completion and confirmation of when the products will be mailed directly to them.

We are embracing the digital age and making—

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

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Today, the Financial Accountability Officer reported that Ontario's housing crisis will continue to get worse. Between 2011 and 2018, under the previous Liberal government, the number of families in core housing need grew by nearly 20%. The FAO says this number will keep growing to more than 815,000 families, which is an increase of more than 80,000 people over the next eight years. Despite this, this government plans to reduce annual spending on housing programs by an average of \$160 million a year.

Minister, we are in the middle of an affordable housing crisis. Why is this government cutting annual spending to affordable housing?

Hon. Steve Clark: I want to thank the Financial Accountability Officer for his report. I want to congratulate the member opposite on being the new housing critic for the official opposition. I was actually

quite encouraged by her opening comments about the fact that Ontario's core housing need is going up. That's exactly why we've called on the federal government to give us our fair share of the National Housing Strategy dollars, based on our core housing need. If we're going to use our core housing need as the metric that I believe the member opposite and I both want to use, then it will be imperative that members from all sides of this House support our call for an additional \$490 million from the federal government.

But I want to remind the member that, over the next three years, the FAO projects that the province's base homelessness program spending will continue to grow, as it has since we've taken office. But, again, Speaker, there were some federal-provincial cost share programs that—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. The supplementary question. The member for Beaches—East York.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Ontario was in homelessness emergency before the pandemic. Now, in the middle of the worst social and economic crisis since the Depression, which has especially hit racialized, immigrant and disabled Ontarians and pushed so many into housing precarity or hidden homelessness, the FAO estimates that the government's spending on housing programs and its spending on base homelessness programs is actually decreasing, from a gross rate of 8% per year over the past seven years to only 3.4% going forward.

Ontario set a goal of ending homelessness by 2025, but the FAO says the government will not meet this goal. Its Poverty Reduction Strategy doesn't even mention or commit any additional funding to homelessness or address its commitment to ending homelessness—all of this in the middle of a pandemic that sees so many on the verge of eviction.

1120

Why won't the Premier and the government recognize the homelessness emergency we're in and act to end it?

Hon. Steve Clark: We are acting to end it. We inherited a system that was largely ignored by the previous government for 15 years. We've decided—listening to experts, the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness—that we will move away from the patchwork of programs that the previous government moved forward on, and we are going to start a by-name list this year. That type of data will be imperative for our government to move forward to end homelessness.

Again, Speaker, I want to remind this member, as I have done almost every time she has asked me a question, we've committed \$1.5 billion to help sustain, repair and grow Ontario's community housing system. And in the middle of the pandemic, our government has committed an additional \$510 million—over half a billion dollars—in additional funds to help our municipal partners join with us and the federal government to help end homelessness. We've made that commitment. We will continue with that commitment, and we will ask the members opposite to join us and work with us.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Roman Baber: My question is to the Premier. One of the greatest catastrophes resulting from the Doug Ford lockdown is the toll on small business. The Premier is quick to stand up for business practices at Walmart. He boasts about talking to the CEO and learning about Walmart's supply chains. But despite claiming to stand up for the little guy, he is completely tone deaf to the reality of small business.

What's more illogical is that it's clear that small business is not a cause for concern. I refer the Premier to the last published weekly epidemiology report from the Public Health Agency of Canada. Table 6 at page 12 lists cases and deaths by outbreak settings. It reveals that only three deaths—three deaths—are attributable to outbreaks in food, drinks, retail and personal care settings in Canada. Compare that to 12,000 deaths in long-term care and 734 deaths in health care.

My question for the Premier: How does he justify the annihilation of small business and the ruining of millions of lives when they are not a cause for COVID concern?

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

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you to the member for highlighting the importance of supporting small businesses. That's exactly what this government has done from the beginning of the pandemic.

Of course, the number one priority is the health and safety of the people we serve. However, understanding that small businesses are going through a very difficult time, we've introduced a series of measures for the smallest of small businesses, whether that was a PPE grant for \$60 million or the Digital Main Street program to help small businesses retool for the new reality under COVID-19; whether that was a tax cut in terms of property tax, saving small businesses up to 30%. That's a permanent measure, Speaker, as well as eliminating the EHT for those small businesses with a payroll up to a million dollars annually. That is also a permanent change.

The member must have seen merit in it because he has voted in favour of every single one of those measures I have just mentioned to support small businesses. I hope the member continues to support small businesses when we table our budget later this month.

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

Mr. Roman Baber: Speaker, no response from the member from Willowdale: Why target small business when it isn't the problem? Whatever peanuts this government is offering, whatever program these Conservatives boast about does not come close to saving these families and their employees.

I'm holding yesterday's letter to the Premier from Regan Irvine, owner of the Irv Gastro Pub, a few blocks away from here. Regan writes, in part: "Over the last year, my mother and I have depleted our life savings to try and keep the restaurant afloat. We have cashed in RRSPs, drained savings accounts, maxed out credit cards and

maxed our lines of credit because the government programs simply aren't enough.

"I don't believe you truly understand the hardships, mental health, stress and daily challenges we face. The growth rate of mental illness, suicide, divorce, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse are never at the forefront. Your half-ass lockdowns are causing people to lose everything while all of you are still"—

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

Mr. Roman Baber: I withdraw the quote from the letter.

"Until any of you experience the financial setbacks and struggles that us small business owners have suffered, you will ... never know the impact of your decisions."

So, would the member from Willowdale please stop with the talking points about government programs and give these businesses a chance to survive by letting them open?

Mr. Stan Cho: I was 12 years old when I walked to the bank with my dad when he had to second-mortgage our house to make payroll, Speaker, to keep the doors open, to pay for the livelihoods that put food on the tables of his employees. I know how difficult it is for small businesses, even during the best of times. That is why—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I apologize. The member for York Centre will come to order and the member for Cambridge will come to order and allow the member for Willowdale to respond.

Mr. Stan Cho: That is why this government, from the beginning, has outlined a series of supports, blanketed measures, in conjunction with all levels of government to make sure these small businesses can weather the storm.

It's unfortunate that that member refers to all of these programs, a blanketed measure, as "peanuts," because the thousands of business that we are speaking to are saying this is helping them during this difficult time. Nobody asked for this globally uncertain situation to come upon us, but this government will stay in step with small businesses, support them until COVID-19 is but a distant memory.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. Two weeks ago, a memo was sent by the Minister of Education to Windsor-Essex school boards, outlining asymptomatic targeted testing in our schools. The memo stated that 5% of elementary and secondary schools and 2% of the student population within the Greater Essex County District School Board would be tested each week, beginning Monday, February 22. Yet here we are, two weeks later, without any concrete plan to roll out testing and no testing being done in our Windsor-Essex schools—not a one.

Why hasn't the Conservative government prioritized and begun asymptomatic testing in Windsor-Essex

schools to ensure that every student and education worker is safe?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I can assure the member that in this government, we have been providing asymptomatic and symptomatic testing in the province well before students returned to school this year. In fact, in Windsor, in the member's community, we actually expanded it. Asymptomatic testing was provided to the Begley school when an outbreak occurred, well before the expansion province-wide. That capacity existed before the Ministry of Education got into the game of providing testing. Because of the Minister of Health, to her credit, 17,000 young people last week alone were tested in this province.

We lead the nation in testing in every measurement. That underscores one truth: We will make it accessible, convenient and local, which is why, in our capacity as the Ministry of Education, we have provided capacity to every public health unit, every school board up to 50,000. We're encouraging families to continue to get tested and use that capacity to keep our schools safe and our staff safe in this province.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: The Minister of Education is the master of illusion. Maybe Penn and Teller will take him on tour with them. I have a copy of the letter from the Minister of Education. I'd love to send it over so he could reacquaint himself with what he put in it.

In fact, this Conservative government has had a year to properly implement a safe school environment that would protect our students and education workers from COVID-19. Despite the calls from experts to ensure smaller, safer class sizes and COVID testing in schools, time and time again, this Conservative government chooses to not invest in our children or education workers.

We are a year into the pandemic. There's no reasonable excuse for this dangerous lack of action. When will the Premier and his Conservative government stop delaying the public health measures that will ensure the safety of our students, education workers and, by extension, our entire community in Windsor-Essex, and actually implement broad asymptomatic testing in schools?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I think what I'm hearing from the member opposite is she would impose a requirement on teachers, on students and on families for testing, and that actually is quite alarming. In the province of Ontario, we believe in ensuring it remains voluntary, the choice of parents. We think they're well-positioned to make that decision for their child. What we can do is make sure it's less invasive—which we have, through saliva-based testing. What we can do is make sure it's in every single school board in the province of Ontario, hitting a 5% target on a weekly basis. We are doing that in partnership with public health units.

The fact is, contrary to the continued efforts—for a year, as the member said—of trying to create fear in the

hearts and minds of parents in Ontario, 99.46% of schools remain open; 85% of schools have no active case at all. Now, that can change. We have to remain on guard. We have kept our guard up and our vigilance up, which is why we've enhanced the screening protocol. It's why we've mandated masking down to grade 1. We've improved the quality—the three-ply mask. It's why this government has continued to invest to keep our schools safe.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: My question is for the Premier. We are two weeks shy of a year since this Premier and government have imposed arbitrary government orders. I provide examples of those in government breaking their own emergency orders over the last 12 months: the Premier visiting his cottage; visiting a mayor to give "happy birthday" greetings; attending a wedding, seemingly without masks being worn; the then-finance minister going on a sunny vacation; the parliamentary assistant for education not wearing a mask in a large gathering.

Can the Premier let us know what fines, if any, were applied in any of these examples?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply for the government, the government House leader.

1130

Hon. Paul Calandra: We did bring in a number of measures to keep the people of the province of Ontario safe. I know the members opposite, both the member for, I believe, York Centre and the member for Cambridge, were enthusiastic supporters, voting for all of those measures. I do congratulate the member for Cambridge. She did stand on a point of privilege and she voted against a motion that she did not feel was appropriate, unlike the member for York Centre, who enthusiastically voted time and time again for all of those measures.

Look, the measures that we put in place have helped ensure that the province is safe. I can appreciate that the member opposite is not favourable to some of these. That is her right. It's her job to stand up for the people of her riding. Ultimately, the people in her riding will pass judgment on the decisions that she's made.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): York Centre, come to order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: We're quite proud of what we have done and what we have accomplished together.

There is more work to do, Mr. Speaker, and we'll get on with that job.

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: It appears that no fines were applied in any of these instances of government members deliberately breaking their own emergency orders. Why, then, was it appropriate for the government to go after \$46,000 in legal fees, plus almost \$40,000 in fines, from the Trinity Bible Chapel of Waterloo region—all because its congregants deemed it essential and an

obligation to congregate for prayer? Surely the government didn't need the money after finding over \$5 million in taxpayer money to fund the Ontario PC Party, as proposed in its most recent legislation, Bill 254.

Hon. Paul Calandra: The honourable member, of course, will know that part of that bill is a continuation of what this government has done in helping independent members find their voice in this place, which includes allowing independent members to raise funds as well. We're quite proud of the work that we've done to help independent members find their voice. We have provided them additional questions in this House for question period. We've guaranteed them seats on committees. We've given them an expanded opportunity to respond to bills and legislation before this House.

So I'm actually very proud of what we have done to democratize this place, to allow the independent members to speak. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, the measures that we have brought in to protect the people of the province of Ontario are very important and are what have helped us keep the rate of infection to the lowest, almost, in North America. I'm quite proud of those. Like the member opposite, I will be judged by those decisions at the next election, and I'm quite confident that—

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

The next question.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Gurratan Singh: How is it possible that in a province as critical as Ontario in the fight against COVID-19, this Conservative government has managed the vaccine rollout so poorly?

As of today, Ontario ranks seventh in per capita vaccinations amongst Canadian provinces. That means we are behind Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and BC. When you add in the territories, we're 10th in per capita vaccinations in Canada.

We are so close to the light at the end of the tunnel for this COVID-19 pandemic. Why and how, at this critical moment, has the Conservative government prepared so poorly for the rollout of vaccines?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, in fact, the reality of the situation is we have already administered over 784,000 vaccines in a very short period of time with an amazing group of people across the province. We have one plan, but it's being delivered by 34 different public health units. Many of them are already well into vaccinating people—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Christine Elliott: —who are over 80 years of age. The plan is rolling forward as we have planned, but the reality is that we need more vaccines. We can triple, quadruple—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Christine Elliott: —the number of people who are receiving vaccines, but we need to receive the vaccines. We expect that the Pfizer and Moderna will—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I apologize to the Minister of Health. I have to ask the member for Essex, the member for Hamilton Mountain and the government House leader to come to order.

Supplementary question?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Back to the Premier: Brampton is a city full of essential workers who don't have the luxury to work from home. They work in factories, in trucking and other essential services that move our economy. They risk their lives every single day so others can work from home. It breaks my heart to know that every single morning, there are workers in Brampton and in Ontario who wake up and force themselves to go to work sick because they cannot afford to lose a day of pay and lose the funds they'll need to put groceries on the table, pay for their rent or pay for their mortgage.

Working people in Brampton, working people in Ontario deserve permanent paid sick days. Yet this Premier voted no to bringing in paid sick days for Ontarians. This Premier actually called paid sick days a waste of taxpayer money. Why does this Premier think it's okay to thank and congratulate front-line essential workers at his press conferences, only to stab them in the back here at this Legislature?

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I'm really glad that the member opposite asked this question. Mr. Speaker, the Ontario Liberal Party in Ontario supported two paid sick days. The NDP in Ontario, of which you're a member, sir, supported—and let me quote your leader: "What we want to see in Ontario is paid sick days: 10 paid sick days—seven, rather 10, seven paid," and yes, that would be the responsibility of employers.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that Premier Doug Ford and the Ontario Progressive Conservative government delivered one month of paid sick days for every worker in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The time for question period has expired. I'll ask and remind all members to make their comments through the Chair.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Toronto Centre has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services concerning child removal from youth justice centres. This matter will be debated on Tuesday, March 9, 2021, following private members' public business.

DEFERRED VOTES

PIPELINES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We now have a deferred vote on Mr. Calandra's amendment to the amendment to government notice of motion 103, a resolution respecting pipelines.

Mr. Calandra moved "that the amendment be amended by deleting the last period and adding at the end: ', recognizing that pipelines are the safest way of transporting energy resources.'"

A recorded vote being required, the bells will now ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their vote. I will ask the Clerks to prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1138 to 1208.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote has been held on Mr. Calandra's amendment to the amendment to government notice of motion 103, a resolution respecting pipelines.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 39; the nays are 11.

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

I will now ask if members are ready to vote on Mr. Natyshak's amendment, as amended. Agreed? Agreed.

Therefore, we will now vote on Mr. Natyshak's amendment, as amended, to government notice of motion 103, a resolution respecting pipelines.

Mr. Natyshak moved that motion 103 be amended as follows:

"Delete everything after 'House,' and replace with the following:

"the Legislative Assembly should recognize that natural resources are responsible for thousands of jobs in Ontario and call upon the federal and provincial governments to protect workers and fight against the closure of line 5."

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 will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, the bells will now ring for 15 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. I'll ask the Clerks to once again prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1212 to 1227.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on Mr. Natyshak's amendment, as amended, to government notice of motion 103, a resolution respecting pipelines, has been held.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 29; the nays are 7.

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

Are members ready to now vote on Mr. Calandra's motion, as amended? Okay.

The vote now is on Mr. Calandra's motion, as amended, as follows:

"That, in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly should recognize that natural resources are responsible for thousands of jobs in Ontario and call upon the federal and provincial governments to protect workers and fight against the closure of line 5, recognizing that pipelines are the safest way of transporting energy resources."

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 now being required, the bells will ring for 15 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. I'll ask the Clerks to prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1231 to 1246.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote has been held on government notice of motion number 103, as amended, respecting pipelines.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 43; the nays are 1.

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

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business at this time, this House will stand in recess for a 10-minute lunch break. We will be back at 1 o'clock.

The House recessed from 1247 to 1300.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I rise in accordance with standing order 59, with respect to the order of business for next week.

On Monday, we will begin with a private member's bill, ballot item number 57, standing in the name of the member for Algoma-Manitoulin. There will be a ministerial statement on International Women's Day, followed by an NDP opposition day and concurrence of estimates.

On March 9, we will be debating a bill which will be introduced later today, and we will have a PMB item, number 58, standing in the name of the member for Davenport. We are still awaiting what that bill will be.

On March 10, again, we will be debating a bill to be introduced later today, and we will conclude our day with ballot item number 59, standing in the name of the member for Don Valley North, which is Bill 250, Recovery Month Act.

On Thursday, again, we will be proceeding with a bill which will be introduced later today, followed by Bill 254, Protecting Ontario Elections Act, and finally, ballot item 60, standing in the name of the member for Beaches-East York, which I believe is a motion concerning COVID-19 rent relief.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I want to recognize the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I have a message from the Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, the Lieutenant Governor, signed by her own hand.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): All members rise.

The Lieutenant Government transmits supplementary estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending March 31, 2021, and recommends them to the Legislative Assembly—signed by Her Honour.

Members may take their seats.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

AWENEN NIIN ACT (WHO AM I)
RESPECTING IDENTITY
DOCUMENTS, 2021

LOI AWENEN NIIN (QUI SUIS-JE)
DE 2021 CONCERNANT
LES PIÈCES D'IDENTITÉ

Ms. Monteith-Farrell moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 256, An Act to amend the Photo Card Act, 2008 and the Vital Statistics Act respecting access to identification documents / Projet de loi 256, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2008 sur les cartes-photo et la Loi sur les statistiques de l'état civil en ce qui concerne l'accès aux pièces d'identité.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member wish to briefly explain her bill?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Yes, thank you, Speaker. The bill amends the Photo Card Act, 2008, to provide that no fee shall be charged to an applicant of a photo card.

The bill also amends the Vital Statistics Act to provide that no fee shall be charged in connection with registering a birth, adding or changing a birth registration, having a search made for the registration of a birth or obtaining a birth certificate. No fee shall be charged in connection with obtaining a certified copy of a registration of birth, change of name, death or stillbirth.

The Vital Statistics Act is also amended to require the Minister of Government and Consumer Services to establish an advisory committee. The committee's mandate is to make recommendations to end the systemic procedural and systemic barriers to obtaining personal identification documents in Ontario. The committee is required to consult with all relevant stakeholders, including, at minimum, the stakeholders included in the bill. The committee is required to report its recommendations to the minister,

and the minister is required to inform the assembly of the recommendations the minister will implement.

SUPPORTING BROADBAND
AND INFRASTRUCTURE EXPANSION
ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SOUTENANT
L'EXPANSION DE L'INTERNET
ET DES INFRASTRUCTURES

Ms. Scott moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 257, An Act to enact the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021 and to make other amendments in respect of infrastructure and land use planning matters / Projet de loi 257, Loi édictant la Loi de 2021 sur la réalisation accélérée de projets d'Internet à haut débit et apportant d'autres modifications en ce qui concerne les infrastructures et des questions d'aménagement du territoire.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'd like to invite the Minister of Infrastructure to briefly explain her bill, if she wishes.

Hon. Laurie Scott: I'll do it in ministry statements, please, Mr. Speaker.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Laurie Scott: I am pleased to rise today to speak about the Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act, 2021. Now, more than ever, we need to build better infrastructure faster, strengthen our communities, and lay the foundation for growth, renewal and long-term economic recovery. That is why our government is building upon legislation we introduced in the fall, the Ontario Rebuilding and Recovery Act, and proposing to take even bolder action through a number of legislative changes.

Today, I am pleased to announce a new, innovative approach that would allow infrastructure to be built faster and in a more cost-effective way, leading to greater investment and job creation across the province.

This proposed act would, if passed, help connect communities to reliable, high-speed Internet sooner, by accelerating the deployment of provincially significant broadband infrastructure across Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, this approach builds on previous commitments our government made as part of our 2019 broadband and cellular action plan. That plan, which includes a historic investment of nearly \$1 billion over six years, is already improving connectivity across the province.

But our world today is very different than it was a year ago, due to COVID-19. The pandemic has magnified changes that were already under way, including the continued global shift to a digital world. Yet as many as 700,000 households and businesses in Ontario still lack access to adequate broadband or have no Internet connection at all. That's why we are working to remove the barriers that are preventing people from connecting more quickly, and if passed, this is what today's proposed legislation would help do.

It would pass the Building Broadband Faster Act, modelled on the Building Transit Faster Act, which would give authority to the Minister of Infrastructure to reduce barriers to the deployment of broadband-related infrastructure. And it would create regulation-making authority under the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998, to reduce barriers regarding the development of, access to and use of electricity infrastructure by third parties. This authority would be used to make it easier for telecommunications service providers to use existing electricity assets such as hydro utility poles, as well as municipal rights-of-way, to expand access to broadband while reducing the costs to do so. It also proposes to require utility companies to consider possible joint use of hydro utility poles during their planning process. Again, this would help to save time and money in the future.

1310

Mr. Speaker, our government understands the pressing need for connectivity in this rapidly expanding digital economy. We need connectivity to work remotely, run a business, take part in online learning, access health care services, or use a growing number of everyday services like online banking or ordering groceries.

Through our proposed legislation, we will work with our partners in communities across Ontario to help pave the way to build infrastructure faster, in a more cost-effective way. Our government is committed to collaborating with our private and municipal partners and others to help accelerate project delivery for the benefit of all individuals, families and workers. It would also send a clear signal that Ontario is committed to expanding broadband connectivity to underserved communities in Ontario.

The legislation, which would include certain regulatory measures, additional enforcement powers and our government's significant investment in broadband projects, would complement our existing and regular engagement with municipal and other stakeholders. It will help us get as many people as possible connected to the Internet, as quickly as possible. It will also help make Ontario more competitive, while boosting our long-term economic recovery.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation, with the changes that I am bringing forward to you today, is important to Ontario's future prosperity. I am proud to be here with my colleagues to introduce this very important piece of legislation.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour to be able to stand in the House today—actually, it's my first time standing

in the House since we're back—to respond to the government and the Minister of Infrastructure introducing the Building Broadband Faster Act. We look forward to looking at what is proposed.

As we all know, in all parts of Ontario, one of the things you need to participate in the modern world is working Internet that is actually fast enough to participate—and affordable. We all know there's something called the digital divide: That's those who have access and can pay, and those who—either there's no access or they lack the capability to pay for it. That is a huge divide. And we look forward to working with the government, where we can, to bring that forward.

One thing that we would like to continue to work with the government on is—the NDP has also proposed a broadband bill, Broadband is an Essential Service Act. I commend the government for wanting to go as quickly as possible, and we will work to try to make that work. But we have to remember that with the digital divide, once most people get broadband, there are going to be people who are going to be left behind, and it will no longer be the issue of the day. We all know that. There's a saying for it: “the last mile.” The last mile is always the hardest people to get service—and those of us in rural Ontario and northern Ontario know where the last mile usually is. What the Broadband is an Essential Service Act is aimed at is that that last mile gets covered, as well. So the two acts could work together. We could actually work together on this one.

There are barriers to Internet, and one of the barriers that the minister mentioned—and we look forward, again, to looking at the act—is the difficulty that some companies have accessing infrastructure that's already there, like hydro poles, like towers. We look forward to looking at that. That is something that we need to look at.

Something else we need to look at is that smaller companies actually have access to the big players' trunk lines, and the big players buying up all the broadband spectrum. That might not be totally provincial, that's federal, but we can work together to push, because there are towns—and I'm not talking about somewhere that's five miles between houses. There are towns in this province that can't get Internet because the cost is through the roof for the backhaul, and that's just because the big players don't feel like playing.

One thing I think that we can agree on, with the government, is that one of the big issues in northern Ontario was when the previous Liberal government sold a big fibre optic cable that we all paid a lot of money to put forward. Ontario Northland Transportation Commission sold it to Bell. They basically gave it away to Bell. That cable could be the trunk line through northern Ontario. That's the same cable that now those towns can't access because Bell doesn't want to play. That's something that we could work on together—to nudge Bell and say, “Hey, wait a second. You got a great deal on that cable, a taxpayer-subsidized cable that the Liberal government gave to you, basically, and now you don't feel like giving the people of northern Ontario access.”

There are all kinds of things that we need to work on together, but we need to make sure that everyone has access to usable, affordable, workable broadband. That's what the NDP has been pushing for a long time, and if we can help the government do that we're happy to do so.

MOTIONS

CONCURRENCE IN SUPPLY

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, if you seek it, I'm sure you will find unanimous consent to move a motion without notice with respect to concurrence in supply.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent of the House to move a motion with respect to concurrence in supply. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that, notwithstanding any standing order, the order for concurrence in supply for the various ministries and offices as represented by government orders 43 through 57, inclusive, shall be called concurrently; and

That when such orders are called, they shall be considered concurrently in a single debate; and

That two hours shall be allotted to the debate, divided equally among the recognized parties, at the end of which time the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of the order for concurrence in supply for each of the ministries referred to above; and

That any required divisions in the orders for concurrence in supply shall be deferred to deferred votes, such votes to be taken in succession.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the government House leader to correct—I think he meant to say “government orders 48” in the first—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Correct, yes; “48 through 57.”

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Calandra has moved that, notwithstanding any standing order, the order for concurrence in supply for the various ministries and offices as represented by government orders 48 through 57, inclusive, shall be called concurrently; and

That when such orders are called, they shall be considered concurrently in a single debate; and

That two hours shall be allotted to the debate, divided equally among the recognized parties, at the end of which time the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of the order for concurrence in supply for each of the ministries referred to above; and

That any required divisions in the orders for concurrence in supply shall be deferred to deferred votes, such votes to be taken in succession.

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

Motion agreed to.

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PETITIONS

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This petition is titled “Reverse Cuts to Social Assistance.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas” Premier “Ford eliminated the Basic Income Pilot project and slashed the new social assistance rates by 1.5%, and did so without warning;

“Whereas cuts to already-meagre social assistance rates will disproportionately impact children, those with mental health challenges, persons with disabilities, and people struggling in poverty;

“Whereas the decision to cancel the Basic Income Pilot project was made without any evidence, and leaves thousands of Ontarians without details about whether they will be able to access other forms of income assistance;

“Whereas the independently authored Income Security: A Roadmap for Change report, presented to the government last fall, recommends both increases to rates and the continuation of the Basic Income Pilot project as key steps towards income adequacy and poverty reduction;

“Whereas the failure to address poverty—and the homelessness, hunger, health crises, and desperation that can result from poverty—hurts people, families and Ontario's communities;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately reverse” this “callous decision to slash increases to social assistance rates ... and reverse his decision to cancel the Basic Income Pilot project, decisions that will undoubtedly hurt thousands of vulnerable people and drag Ontario backwards when it comes to homelessness reduction and anti-poverty efforts.”

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

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Donna Skelly: “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 and support this petition and will affix my signature.

TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This petition is titled “Stop the TTC Subway Upload.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the TTC has owned, operated and maintained Toronto’s public transit system since 1921; and

“Whereas the people of Toronto have paid for the TTC at the fare box and through their property taxes; and

“Whereas uploading the subway will mean higher fares, reduced service and less say for transit riders; and

“Whereas the TTC is accountable to the people of Toronto because elected Toronto city councillors sit on its board;

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

“Reject ... the privatization or contracting out of any part of the TTC; and

“Match the city of Toronto’s financial contribution to the TTC so transit riders can have improved service and affordable fares.”

As a transit rider myself, I couldn’t agree more. I support this petition and will affix my signature to it.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This petition is titled “A Safe Plan to Reopen Schools and Child Care.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas” Premier Ford has “failed to provide the funding or the plan needed to ensure kids can return to schools and child care centres in a safe and supportive way; and

“Whereas we need an immediate action plan;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to create a plan that includes:

“—paid sick leave and parental leave in” school “return;

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

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

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

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

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING ONTARIO ELECTIONS ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA PROTECTION DES ÉLECTIONS EN ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 3, 2021, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 254, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to elections and members of the Assembly / Projet de loi 254, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les élections et les députés à l’Assemblée.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: It’s my honour to rise today to speak to Bill 254, the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, 2021. With this bill, our government is proposing steps to make it easier and safer for Ontarians to vote and participate in provincial elections. We are introducing this bill to ensure individual Ontarians remain at the centre of our electoral process.

I strongly believe that Ontario voters should determine the outcome of elections. The last thing I think any of us want to see here in Ontario is American-style political action groups using unlimited funds to try to influence election results. As we’ve all seen in the US recently, it can be very dangerous if the public’s faith in the electoral process is shaken.

In order for our democracy to work well, the people need to have faith in our voting systems, and it needs to be easy for them to take part. The 2018 general election was historic in Ontario for the use of technology in voting at the polls. I think it was a success. Going back to my point about faith in the voting system, Elections Ontario reported in their report on Ontario’s 42nd general election that 91% of electors had high confidence in the new technology.

In an effort to ensure our elections continue to adapt to new technologies while at the same time maintaining public confidence, this bill proposes to allow the Chief Electoral Officer to create a committee to advise on voting and vote-counting equipment going forward. This committee’s advice would be used to address one of the Chief Electoral Officer’s recommendations in his 2018-19 annual report. That recommendation is to establish common evaluative standards and a certification process for election technology.

For the record, I want to quote the Chief Electoral Officer on this recommendation: “Technology holds a lot of promise for the elections of the future. Increasingly, Ontarians expect that technology will be used to make voting easier, offer more choice to electors for when, where and how to vote, and find efficiencies in the electoral process. Electoral management bodies, including Elections Ontario, are increasingly turning to technology to solve logistical challenges.”

The Chief Electoral Officer goes on to say, “It is critical that our approach to technology be intentional and

evidence-based. Even as the public expects electoral management bodies to find efficiencies through technology, they are also increasingly aware of the possible failures of technology. While there are many benefits to using technology, there are risks involved, as illustrated by recent failures of systems at large organizations.”

He concludes, “To ensure we maintain public trust in our electoral system as we adopt technology, the Chief Electoral Officer recommends that Ontario establish a set of common evaluative standards and guidelines. These will advise election administrators as they consider which technology to adopt, how to evaluate the technology, and the specific technical standards” to use. This is a recommendation that the Chief Electoral Officer also made in his report after the 2014 general election.

Our government agrees that common guidelines and standards for the use of technology are important. This bill lays out the structure of a committee to establish those standards. The committee will include representatives appointed by each party represented in the Legislative Assembly, with between one and three other experts in the field. As technology will continue to change, this committee is intended to be ongoing.

This bill is also acting on some other recommendations that came from the Chief Electoral Officer’s 2018-19 annual report. For example, this bill proposes to amend the Election Finances Act to allow the Chief Electoral Officer to levy administrative penalties against individuals and organizations who contravene the Election Act or the Election Finances Act.

Currently, the only tool the Chief Electoral Officer has to drive compliance is to report any infractions, even minor ones, to the independent prosecutors of the Ministry of the Attorney General for prosecution. In order for any penalty to be imposed, the case then has to go through the court system. If this bill passes, the Chief Electoral Officer will still be able to refer major violations to Ontario’s prosecutors. However, allowing the Chief Electoral Officer to act on minor violations through this administrative monetary penalty framework should increase compliance with the rules and help ensure fair elections for everyone.

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The bill sets significant maximum fines, but also lays out how penalties are to be determined based on a number of factors, including intentionality, harm done, benefit received and whether there is a history of contravention.

A smaller but important change that also was recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer is to establish a minimum threshold of contributions before an audit is required. Currently, any candidate, constituency association or party must appoint an auditor as soon as they are registered, even if they have little or no money or financial activity in their accounts. It makes no sense to audit an account that doesn’t have any money in it or has had little financial activity. And because Elections Ontario subsidizes the cost of audits, these unnecessary audits are costing the taxpayers money.

In recommending a minimum threshold before an audit is required, our current Chief Electoral Officer, Greg Essensa, noted that in the 2018-19 fiscal year, Elections Ontario paid out more than \$2 million in audit subsidies. Specifically, Bill 254 proposes that constituency associations, parties and candidates be required to appoint an auditor only once those accounts have received \$10,000 in financial activity.

While those are important changes, most Ontarians don’t think about how political organizations are audited.

On the other hand, I want to talk about something that will impact a lot of people. Another recommendation from the Chief Electoral Officer is to establish 10 days of advance polls as opposed to only five days. Again, I want to quote from the Chief Electoral Officer’s 2018-19 annual report:

“Current legislation requires five days of advance voting at fixed voting locations during the period that begins on the 12th day and ends on the 8th day before election day. The 2018 general election was the first held under these requirements for advance voting, and the process did not meet public expectations.

“Public polling conducted on behalf of Elections Ontario found that Ontarians are looking for more options to cast their ballot ahead of election day, including a growing desire to vote during advance voting.

“To remove barriers to voting and put the needs of voters first, the Chief Electoral Officer recommends extending advance voting at non-returning office voting locations to 10 days, as well as more flexibility to rotate voting locations to facilitate the needs and behaviours of voters.”

As the Chief Electoral Officer said, in the 2018 provincial election, there were five advance poll days and every advance poll location was required to be open every day of those five days. Prior to the last election, rotating advance polls were allowed over a longer window of time, and with this bill, our government is proposing to return to that system.

To offer some perspective to those MPPs representing urban ridings, let me tell you about my riding. Parry Sound–Muskoka includes 26 municipalities, some with populations of less than 1,000 people; unorganized territories; and seven First Nations spread out over roughly 15,000 square kilometres. There are many people in my riding who would have to drive at least an hour each way to reach one of the two returning offices. And of course, there are many ridings that are much bigger than mine. Despite those distances, residents in rural ridings deserve the same opportunities to vote as residents in urban ridings. They deserve to have easy access to an advance poll close to home.

The changes proposed in this bill will mean that there could be an advance poll in one location for a day or two, then in another location for a day or two. Particularly in large ridings like mine, allowing for rotating advance polls allows for an advance poll in some of the smaller communities.

This also gives the local returning officers more flexibility in choosing venues for advance polls. For example,

if a returning officer wants to have the advance poll at a local arena, but there are hockey tournaments or other events scheduled on the weekend, they could hold the advance poll in that location during the week, when the space is available.

The Chief Electoral Officer repeated this recommendation in his report on election administration during a pandemic, explaining: “The interest in early voting has only grown due to the pandemic. This was evident in the general elections held in New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. As voters returned to the polls in 2020, we have witnessed a shift in electors choosing to vote early in record numbers. In New Brunswick, the number of voters choosing to cast their ballots early—either by mail or during advance voting—surpassed election day turnout for the first time, with 35% of voters choosing advance voting. It was the same in Saskatchewan, with 41% of voters voting in advance polls.

“In British Columbia, 36% of voters chose advance voting while only 29% of voters opted to vote in person on election day. In the United States, over 100 million voters chose early voting, either in person or by mail, with early voting in some states surpassing overall voter turnout for 2016. The trend shows that more people are voting early, either by mail or during advance voting, which is a departure from past practice of voters waiting until election day to cast a ballot.

“While historically Ontarians have chosen advance voting at lower rates than in other provinces, we expect to see a similar increase in interest” in the 2022 general election. “Greater access to advance voting during the pandemic would also mean we are able to spread out the number of voters arriving at a location to cast their ballot—supporting provincial efforts to avoid large gatherings....”

Beyond those changes suggested by the Chief Electoral Officer, this bill makes a number of other changes.

This bill addresses the role of independent MPPs and proposes to allow independent members of the Legislature to create constituency associations. This will allow them to raise money between elections so they can continue to engage with volunteers in the community in the same way as other MPPs, among other benefits.

The bill would also allow individuals to donate more to the political party or parties of their choice. This bill proposes increasing the donation limit to \$3,300. To put this in context, limits across Canada range from no donation limit in Newfoundland and Labrador and Saskatchewan, to a \$100 limit in Quebec. Nova Scotia and Manitoba have a \$5,000 limit. Alberta has a \$4,243 limit. PEI has a limit of \$3,100; New Brunswick, \$3,000; BC, \$1,268. As you can see, this change will put Ontario very much in the middle of the pack for political donation limits.

While this bill would increase the donation limit, we all know that the vast majority of donations to local constituency associations and local campaigns are much smaller and often connected with a fundraising event. This bill would decrease the paperwork and red tape involved in small-scale, low-cost fundraising events. I know that every

riding association and campaign CFO in the province is going to like this change. If this bill passes, CFOs will be able to issue tax receipts for fundraising events with direct costs of \$30 or less per person, without having to produce detailed receipts. This will allow attendees to receive their tax receipts sooner.

One of the smaller changes introduced in this bill is a provision that allows Elections Ontario to share the voters list with district social services administration boards. I realize that some members may not have experience with DSSABS. DSSABs, as their name implies, administer social services in rural areas and are made up of representatives from local municipalities. However, where a DSSAB includes unorganized territories, there are individuals elected to represent those areas, as well.

The Parry Sound DSSAB is a perfect example of this. Most members of the board are representatives of municipalities or groups of municipalities, but two board members represent the unorganized territories in the north end of my riding, around Port Loring and Restoule. When there’s an election for those representatives, the DSSAB needs access to the voters list. In the past, this information came from MPAC, but that responsibility is moving to Elections Ontario, which makes sense to me.

Another section of the bill allows that candidates may register and be certified by the returning officer up to six months before the writ is dropped. This is a small change that will make it easier for campaign volunteers—in particular, CFOs—to prepare for the campaign. As of right now, a candidate cannot be certified as a candidate until the writ, and the campaign cannot do things like open a bank account until the candidate is certified.

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Being a CFO is a thankless job that comes with a lot of responsibility, and it’s sometimes difficult to find someone willing to take on this job. If this change makes it easier for CFOs to perform their duties, I think it’s worthwhile.

This change should also help local returning officers by allowing them to do this paperwork ahead of time and not be fielding calls from campaign managers or candidates frantically looking for certification documents on the day the writ is dropped.

One of the realities of being an MPP is that you have to be a politician first. We all know we have to keep our political work and our legislative and government work separate. We ourselves have to be both political and non-partisan. The advent of social media has made it challenging for MPPs to know how to manage our social media accounts during the transition into and out of elections. Should we all have two separate sets of accounts, one that we use to communicate with constituents between elections and one that we use to communicate with voters and supporters during an election? Basically, this bill clarifies that MPPs can maintain one social media account before, during and after an election, as long as they follow the rules and guidelines that apply to MPPs and ministers, respectively, with regard to things they post while they are in those roles.

This bill would also allow for the Legislative Assembly to set rules regarding how social media accounts of MPPs can be used, something both current and former Integrity Commissioners have recommended. Ontario is the first province in Canada that is tackling this issue, and I'm proud of that.

Finally, the bill further refines the rules around third-party advertising in Ontario. As I said off the top, I really feel that we need to further regulate third-party advertising in order to ensure we don't end up with American-style political action groups. Third-party advertising has been growing since the 1990s. Ontario's regulation of third-party advertisers started in 2007 and has evolved slowly, often at the recommendation of the Chief Electoral Officer. But it wasn't until only a few years ago that there were any limits on what third-party advertisers could spend before or during an election.

In his 2014 general election report, the Chief Electoral Officer noted, "Since regulations regarding third-party advertisers were introduced in 2007, the number of third parties has more than tripled—from 11 in 2007 to 19 in 2011 to 35 in 2014."

He went on to say:

"In recent elections, certain third parties have increased significantly what they spend on advertising. Meanwhile, of the jurisdictions in Canada that regulate third-party advertising, Ontario is the only one where third parties do not face advertising spending or contribution limits. The Chief Electoral Officer believes that this reality could very well produce a situation in which parties and candidates campaign on an uneven playing field.

"All other political entities in the electoral process are subject to spending and contribution limits as well as greater reporting and disclosure requirements. The rules related to third parties are not consistent with how all other political entities are treated and should be strengthened to promote greater transparency."

Following this recommendation, Ontario did start to limit ad spending by third-party advertisers. In 2018, each registered third party was allowed to spend up to \$600,000 in the six months leading up to the writ and \$100,000 during the writ. Both of these amounts have increased and will continue to increase with inflation, and the amounts are not changing with this legislation.

The only thing this bill proposes to change is with respect to the time period leading up to the writ. Third parties will now be allowed to spend up to \$637,000 in the 12 months prior to the writ, not six months. Nothing with respect to spending during the writ period has changed.

After the 2018 election, Elections Ontario reported registering 59 third-party advertisers, and those advertisers spent more than \$5 million in the lead-up to and during the election period. I think it's fair to say that spending limits didn't prevent groups from being able to express their views through advertising.

We all know that any time you set a limit, someone, somewhere, tries to find a way around the limit. This bill continues the evolution of Ontario's third-party advertising rules by further defining what constitutes collusion

among third parties or between third parties and political entities. This bill also proposes clearer definitions regarding collusion in the context of Ontario's elections. Speaker, we are proposing rules to address collusion that focus on sharing of resources, not merely sharing a message.

Currently, collusion can only be established where it can be proven that a third party's advertising has been done with the knowledge and consent of a candidate or party. Our proposed amendment would clearly define collusion both between third parties and political entities and among third parties. We looked at the federal definition of collusion and strengthened it based on that.

Speaker, I can see I'm just about out of time, so I'd just like to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak. I'll miss my last half page of my speech—but thank you.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you for your speech today. I really do appreciate it. I guess I should commend you for your bravery for getting up to speak, because I think you're one of two on that side who has addressed this bill. So I either commend you for your bravery—or condolences for drawing the short straw. It's hard to know what happened there. But thank you for this.

You started your speech talking about the American-style election, and you made a thinly veiled reference to the conspiracy about the election in the States, people's mistrust of the election system, what they're calling the big lie: that the election results weren't correct.

My question to you is, why would you invoke that kind of concern about elections when it's not the case here in Ontario? If you truly wanted to restore confidence, why didn't you reduce the contribution instead of raising it?

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for that question.

I'm sure there are going to be lots of other speakers in our party eagerly looking forward to speaking to this bill. I certainly want to commend the Attorney General for bringing it forward, because I think he's done an excellent job with it.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, we want to see the individual be at the centre of elections, not corporations that have a lot of money. I believe it was 2017 when the rules changed, banning corporate or union donations to individuals and to parties. I think that's a good thing. The new rules are going to make for a fairer election, and one that's fair for anybody who wants to run for election. That's certainly a positive thing.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member from Northumberland—Peterborough South.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you to the member for his remarks today. I think you'll hear a lot of snarky, smug comments. But I'm going to direct my question, unlike the members opposite, to some of the evidence-based measures that are in this bill.

You spoke at great length on recommendations the Chief Electoral Officer made—one of them to expand advance polling. We both share rural ridings. I know how

important it is for the folks out in Westwood, Brighton, Codrington, to make sure that they have access to an expanded number of days to vote. We saw, certainly, in Newfoundland how important that will be here in the province. I'm wondering if you could elaborate a little more on that.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for that question.

Yes, especially for those of us who represent rural ridings, I think it's really important. It was a recommendation of the Chief Electoral Officer with COVID-19 in mind, both the special report he did on COVID-19, where he recommended going from five to 10 advance poll days and making it more flexible—he also, of course, recommended a committee for technology, which makes voting more flexible, as well.

In a rural riding—my riding is 15,000 square kilometres. It's huge. It could be easily an hour and a half drive to one of the returning offices. This will add more flexibility and make it easier for people to vote closer to their home. I think we all want to see higher participation rates in elections, and this is a very good suggestion from the Chief Electoral Officer. That's one of the many aspects of this bill—many of his recommendations have been picked up, and I think it will be a positive thing.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I hope my question isn't too snarky or smug for some of the members opposite.

My friend from Parry Sound—Muskoka started talking about the technology used in the last provincial election. In Windsor—Tecumseh, I went up to the Baptist church to vote, and the city of Windsor used voting machines they had rented from America. After I voted, up came this American flag on the screen, saying, "Thank you for voting."

We saw with COVID-19 that we weren't prepared with personal protective equipment or didn't have enough masks or ventilators and don't have enough vaccines—all of it's offshore.

I'm wondering if you're aware of any government initiative that has decided to build voting machines in Ontario or in Canada so we don't have to continue to rent them from the United States.

1350

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you for that excellent question.

I agree with the member that it would be preferred if we had something made in Ontario and made in Canada, and certainly that has been a theme of our COVID-19 times.

In this bill, what is happening with regard to technology—and it's based on the recommendation from the Chief Electoral Officer—is that he's recommending a committee that would essentially be a permanent committee, because, as we know, every four years the technology is likely going to change for elections. That committee would be made up of representatives from all political parties, as well as some experts. Hopefully, that committee would also recommend trying to source it in

Ontario or Canada, if that is possible. I'm not an expert on the voting machines, but I know it would certainly be the preference of this government if we could find one made in Ontario or Canada—

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: With regard to the member, I want to talk about third-party advertising and collusion, actually.

We strongly believe that Ontario voters should determine the outcome of elections—not big corporations or unions, American-style political action groups or other outside influences. In this proposed legislation, the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, we are proposing to build on the Ontario Legislature's 2016 decision to ban corporate and union donations, by requiring third-party advertising spending limits to begin 12 months before an election instead of six months before.

My question to the member is, will you please explain how this change will address concerns that third parties are having an outsized influence on our elections?

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for the question.

Yes, there was legislation passed, as you mentioned, banning union and corporate donations to individuals and parties. I think that's a positive thing. So it's only individuals now contributing.

And we brought in rules with regard to the limits on third-party advertising. There are still fairly significant amounts of money: It's \$600,000. The only change that has been made is to go from six months to 12 months prior to the writ period, and there's still over \$100,000 allowed to be spent in the writ.

There is also more definition of "collusion," because you get could some interested parties having an outsized effect on the election based on getting together and spending huge amounts of money, and that's meant to be addressed with this more specific definition of what—

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

Ms. Sara Singh: I want to thank the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka for a pretty impassioned plea about this bill and what it's going to do for Ontarians.

Given the state of the world right now and the fact that we're managing a global pandemic here in the province, can the member help us understand why this is a priority for your government—and not measures like helping provide direct supports to businesses, creating paid sick days here in the province, or helping to cap class sizes here in Ontario?

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for that question.

What I would say is, the government can do more than one thing at once. Obviously, support for businesses, support for paid sick days through the negotiated agreement with the federal agreement, and keeping our schools safe are all huge priorities of the government.

Elections are important, as well. The Chief Electoral Officer did a special report specifically to do with holding

elections in COVID-19 times. We don't know what the situation will be next year. But this is timely because there is an election in June 2022, and many of his recommendations, like moving to 10 advance poll days and improving technology, are really important. If we're still in a pandemic and trying to keep people separated, those are important things so that we can carry out a fair election that's decided by the people of Ontario.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Bill 254 carries the title of Protecting Ontario Elections. I'm sure my constituents want to know why we're dealing with elections when we could be debating a bill without "elections" in the title and just called "Protecting Ontario."

The government knows 17 more people died from COVID-19 yesterday in our province. Together we've lost more than 7,000 friends, neighbours and relatives in the past year. We still have 668 COVID-19 patients in hospital, 274 in the ICU and 188 hooked up to a ventilator. We're talking about elections when 3,869 residents in long-term care have died and will never vote again, and 10 staff members have died while looking after our most vulnerable citizens.

The experts tell us we need those who come down with COVID-19 to stay home, in isolation, until they're well enough to return to work. We know the federal government has a program to help with that, but it's cumbersome and complicated and doesn't work for people who need time off to get tested or to look after an ill child.

The provincial government has an opportunity to accept the advice of medical experts and to augment the federal sick leave program with a made-in-Ontario solution to keep us all safe and to make serious headway into flattening the curve and getting ahead of any new wave of this pandemic.

I like a few of the things in Bill 254, just as I applaud our community colleges, such as my own St. Clair College, for offering free tuition for students being trained to become personal support workers. We need more PSWs to help us serve our seniors.

But I also received a letter this morning from Scott Merryfield, the president of Canadian College on Walker Road in Windsor. He's upset that our publicly funded community colleges will be offering free tuition at the expense of centres such as his, which also offers training for PSWs. To quote him: "As you may know, career colleges are the largest sector trainers of PSWs in Ontario, responsible for training 70% of the province's PSWs each year. I am shocked that our students were completely excluded from this program."

Mr. Merryfield goes on to say in his letter that "career college businesses are now being devastated by the decision to provide free tuition to our publicly funded counterparts. This sector normally trains 4,000 PSWs annually. Now student enrolment at PSW career colleges is quickly dropping to zero."

This is an unintended consequence of government policy, but, as President Merryfield claims, the accelerated

PSW training program creates a business environment that is destined to bankrupt career college operators.

I mention all of this, Speaker, because we are spending time today debating a bill on election reform instead of finding better ways of dealing with a worldwide pandemic and the unintended consequences of the government's decisions.

There are so many other issues that we could be debating today—issues specific to one group or another—rather than electoral reform.

I had a letter this week from Environmental Defence. They wanted to remind me that the government is long overdue on a promised Canada-Ontario Lake Erie action plan and a commitment to publish a public-facing work plan. An action plan for Lake Erie was released three years ago, and a work plan was supposed to be released back in 2019. If we were in education, we would be getting a late slip from the Environmental Defence people.

Restoring the health of Lake Erie is a higher priority for more people than donors with deep pockets, the land barons and business tycoons who may be paying attention to Bill 254.

The government has committed to reduce phosphorus pollution by 40% in Lake Erie by 2025. So the clock is ticking on the health of Lake Erie.

1400

My friends Jack Gibbons and Angela Bischoff at Ontario Clean Air Alliance would rather we be discussing concerns about a proposed new nuclear reactor in the GTA than Bill 254, on electoral reform. OPG wants a small modular nuclear reactor at the Darlington site, Speaker, near your home community of Oshawa. It could produce electricity at a cost of 16.3 cents a kilowatt hour, which sounds okay until you compare it to the cost of solar power at 3.4 cents and onshore wind at seven cents a kilowatt hour. So a small reactor would be two to five times more expensive than power from solar and onshore wind. That is certainly a topic worthy of debate in this House.

Instead, we're talking about doubling the amount of money a donor with deep pockets could contribute to the coffers of the Conservative government. Critics say Bill 254 provides for a massive cash grab, paving the way for donors who want to cozy up to the government to double the annual amount of money they can give to prove their friendship, from \$1,650 a year to \$3,300 a year.

Most people in Ontario, those with blue- and pink-collar jobs, cannot afford to give away more than \$3,000 a year to a political party. I'll go out on a limb and suggest that most working people might be able to squeeze \$30, \$50, maybe even \$100 if they really feel strongly about a candidate, a party or a policy. But, Speaker, how many people do you hang out with who can afford to write a cheque for \$3,300? And why now, in the middle of a global pandemic, are we even talking about changing—indeed, doubling—the amount rich people can donate to the Conservative government of their choice in Ontario? With seniors and parents flooding my office with calls and emails about life-saving vaccines, why has this government chosen as today's priority the issue of allowing

their rich friends the ability of giving twice as much money as before?

Speaker, I'm sure you're aware of this, but for the folks at home who have never given any thought to this before today, on average in Ontario last year, the average donation made by an individual to the NDP was \$29—not \$1,650, and certainly not \$3,300. By contrast, the average donation from an individual to the Liberal Party was \$146. On average, people give New Democrats \$29; they give the Liberals \$146, I suppose, because Liberal donors are more well off and can afford more—which brings us to the Conservative Party, the government party, and the size of their average donation from a party supporter.

Last year, in Ontario, the average donation to the Conservative Party was \$359—\$359, compared to the NDP average of \$29 and the Liberal average of \$146. Those numbers speak for themselves.

Speaker, why on earth, when we could be dealing with issues of life and death—vaccines, masks, social distancing—has the government placed in front of us a bill that would encourage their largest donors and richest friends with the opportunity to make an annual donation of \$3,300 instead of \$1,650, when the average donor last year either gave \$29 to the NDP, \$146 to the Liberals or \$359 to the Progressive Conservatives?

I think all provincial politicians would favour 10 days for advance polling prior to an established election date. Currently—we've seen five advance polls, so doubling that to 10 would allow for more people to get to the polls on a day and time more suitable to their daily schedules. Offering incentives such as making more advance polling possibilities available, making it easier to vote for the party of their choice, is a good thing. Doubling the maximum amount you can donate to the party of your choice? No, not so much, because most of us simply could never afford to pull out a chequebook and give away \$3,300 this year to a political party—especially this year, after the economic devastation that COVID-19 has inflicted upon us all. Small business owners whose stores have been closed for much of the year can't afford it. Workers in the service industry who have been laid off for much of the year could never afford it.

So who are the people this section of Bill 254 is aimed at? Who can afford to donate more than \$3,000 to the party of their choice? And why, after all we've learned during the dark fundraising, cash-for-access days of the former Liberal government, are we even tempting donors with deep pockets to cozy up even closer to the party in power? What hidden agenda is being held up as a valid reason—the incentive, the carrot in front of the stick—what access, to encourage the business tycoons and land barons to give more, twice as much as last year? What is their promised reward for such a generous contribution?

The party in power always has an advantage when it comes to fundraising. Have we not learned from our recent history? Why do we dare walk a fine line with the fundraising controversy again?

Speaker, let's look at Hansard. Monday, September 26, 2016—my friend from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, who

now serves as Ontario's Associate Minister of Energy. The Liberal scandal over cash for access was on the table. Quoting from Hansard: "We in the ... PC caucus remain committed to developing political financing legislation that creates a level playing field and is in the best interests of Ontarians, not the Wynne Liberals' own political survival. It's about fairness and it's about the ability to debate and to be a part of democracy."

Mr. Walker, the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, goes on to talk about the way the Liberals did their fundraising: "Almost \$19.6 million for the Liberal Party coffers since Kathleen Wynne was sworn in back in 2013. According to the Globe and Mail, the Ontario Liberal Party held more than 150 intimate cash-for-access fundraisers in Ms. Wynne's first three years in power"—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Sorry to interrupt the member. Stop the clock.

You cannot say indirectly what you can't say directly. Although you are quoting Hansard—if you'll do your best to insert riding names or titles, as opposed to the member's full name.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you for that. Yes, I'm quoting directly from Hansard, so it was stated without interruption before, but I will take your words of advice.

"For example, on the evening of March 2, 2015, Premier Kathleen Wynne gathered with eight guests who paid \$10,000 each for exclusive face time. Three months earlier, 22 donors spent \$5,000 apiece to be entertained by Finance Minister Charles Sousa. Days later, eight people paid \$5,000 each to attend a reception with then-Energy Minister Bob Chiarelli, according to the Globe. These were just three of the more than 150 intimate cash-for-access fundraisers that that party, the Liberal Party, held in the last three years."

The MPP for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound went on to say, "It is believed that some of these events were attended by the banks that made nearly \$60 million off the privatization of Hydro One."

Speaker, Hansard is a wonderful tool, a repository of information and fact.

On Wednesday, September 28, 2016, the member for Chatham–Kent–Leamington, as quoted in Hansard, said, "Secret fundraisers and selling cash-for-access to ministers has damaged the public's trust in our democracy. The fact that so many people in Ontario feel that their government has been bought and paid for is a shame. By so clearly losing this opportunity to strengthen the integrity of our democracy—one that would outlast each and every one of us and should be our top priority—the government has once again shown that their true concern is the financial well-being of the Liberal Party of Ontario. Everything else, Speaker, comes second."

On October 3, 2016, the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka is quoted in Hansard, talking about a Globe and Mail article by Adrian Morrow: "We heard stories and read about how senior ministers had quotas, targets—whatever you want to call it—goals of \$500,000 for senior ministers like the Minister of Finance. That's how much money they were expected to raise for the Liberal Party."

The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka went on to talk about the people who attended these types of fundraisers and what they expected to get out of attendance: “If you don’t think they’re going to want to have some influence over policy for paying that \$6,000, I think you have your head in the sand.”

On the following day, October 4, 2016, my friend from Nepean–Carleton, who now serves as the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, is quoted in Hansard, speaking about the cash-for-access scandal of the Liberal government, saying that’s not what the people in Ontario expected from their politicians: “The people who live in Nepean–Carleton or anywhere else in this province who want to invest in myself or the member from Windsor–Tecumseh or the member from Mississauga–Streetsville want to give their \$50 or \$100 at a barbecue or a corn boil or a spaghetti supper.”

1410

Speaker, those were the days when the Conservatives and the New Democrats worked well together.

It’s discouraging these days to hear government members tell the House how the NDP propped up the Liberals when the Liberals held a majority in this Legislature.

Let me pull out another quote from Hansard from the member who now serves as the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, again from 2016: “I want to thank the New Democrats. I think the New Democrats and Conservatives worked very well in committee. I think we grasped what people wanted: They wanted cash-for-access to end.”

Speaker, since I started with a quote from my good friend from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, allow me to end this portion with a couple more, again from Hansard, as he was being shouted down for making his comments on the cash-for-access scandal: “Sadly, it’s indicative of this government’s approach. They don’t really want any message to be heard unless it’s theirs, so that they can control the message. They don’t want debate. They don’t want us to present facts to them.” The member went on to say in Hansard, “The Ontario government should not be for sale to the highest or the largest Liberal donor, and government contracts, grants or subsidies should never be traded for political favours.” I couldn’t agree more, no matter which party is in power.

I’m reminded of a quote from the American futurist R. Buckminster Fuller: “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.”

Speaker, we can do better when it comes to funding political parties—better than what the Conservatives have on the table today.

But again, I ask, why are we debating political fundraising at all when we could be dealing with issues such as the problems with the vaccine rollout, the crisis in our long-term-care homes, the need for paid sick days and so on?

We could be discussing community-based hospice palliative care. That will have more impact on us than how

much we can donate to a political party each year. A hospice bed costs one third of hospital care. Since 2017, more than 20,000 people bypassed hospital or were discharged from a hospital and entered hospice care, saving close to \$200 million and freeing up more than 325,000 hospital bed days for other patients. Hospice care is provided with the help of 16,000 trained volunteers, and more than 50% of the cost of running a hospice is covered by local fundraising. COVID-19 has hampered those fundraising efforts.

We could be debating how much of the clinical costs of a hospice this government should be funding. Currently, the funding model puts all rural and remote hospices at a disadvantage. The government has it in its power to make changes, such as allowing hospices to be exempt from development charges and educational levies. Such changes could do more for Ontario than allowing rich people with deep pockets to donate more money to political parties.

I know the wardens in western Ontario would rather we be speaking this afternoon about broadband than doubling the amounts donors contribute to political parties. Speaker, as you know, broadband is a huge issue in many rural communities across Ontario. In fact, the member from Perth–Wellington raised broadband as an issue in question period this morning. The Minister of Infrastructure made a statement just moments ago in the House. She also places much of the blame on the federal government, which is an accurate description. She adds that Ontario is doing its share and more. Yes, but the Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus needs help to complete its Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology project, known as SWIFT. Upon completion, SWIFT phase 1 will still see 10% of the population in western Ontario without access to fast, reliable broadband service. The wardens’ caucus has the plan to get that 10% down to 5% by 2026, but that will still leave 149,000 premises, or 372,000 residents, underserved.

Broadband connectivity has to be recognized as an essential service utility by municipalities, government regulatory bodies and the provincial and federal governments. The Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus want a coordinated strategy that entwines all levels of government with a program that will incentivize and assist the private sector Internet service providers to provide enhanced broadband connectivity to rural and small urban communities in Ontario.

We could be debating the need for \$261 million in broadband improvements in western Ontario, as opposed to the priority of the PC government to allow their friends and supporters to double the amount of money they can donate to them in the coming year.

Speaker, we have learned lessons during the COVID-19 epidemic, but we don’t always learn from our mistakes. For example, offshore workers are beginning to make their way to Ontario’s farms and greenhouses. We know the impact that COVID-19 had on the migrant farm workers last year. We don’t have enough time to get into it right now, but we have to be doing more for the migrant farm workers in Ontario.

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

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate the remarks from my friend the member for Windsor–Tecumseh—a lot of interesting points raised.

One of the things in this bill that I'm very excited about is our government's move to extend the advance voting to 10 days. This is something that I think is going to be tremendously impactful in my riding of Ottawa West–Nepean, where we have one of the largest seniors populations in all of Ontario. Of course, a lot of our seniors like to be able to get out and vote early and avoid some of those crowds, even outside of COVID-19 times.

I wonder if the member for Windsor–Tecumseh could comment a little bit on how this extension to 10 days will benefit residents in his riding.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: As I said in my remarks, I think it's great. I think advancing advance polls to 10 days instead of five makes sense, and there's no reason why that hasn't been done before.

In my case, I come up on a train Sunday night and I go home Thursday night, and if there was no advance voting that Friday or Saturday—or Sunday, I suppose, for that matter—I might run into problems actually being in town on voting day. And it's not just me—people from down in my area normally would go to Florida for the season. I know that in previous fall elections, municipal elections, some of them had already left town before the advance polls had even opened up.

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

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Thank you to my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh for your very elucidating and fascinating presentation.

As a rookie MPP, I'm always trying to think about ways to engage people in the political process, which I think is really important. But as I listened to you talk about how many members who are currently on the government side, but who were in opposition in the last government, argued against exactly what their government is putting in place today—it is no wonder that many Ontarians throw up their hands in disgust at the political system.

I invite the member to comment on that, if he would care to, but I'm also interested to know what his constituents would prefer us to be talking about today.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you for that question.

It was interesting in the old days, when the Conservatives and the New Democrats were hand in hand fighting the Liberals on time allocation. The Liberals would bring in a bill and then time-allocate it to shut off debate, and nobody in the House was more adamant and opposed to that than the current Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. His guillotine arm would come down—I don't want to break anything. He would slam it on the desk as they cut off debate.

And what have we heard from this government on time allocation since then—to cut off debate, to limit debate, to limit discussion? More and more of the same, of time allocation.

Those of us who were hand in hand with the Conservatives in those days, as we fought the Liberals, just shudder that now they're silent when it comes to time allocation. That's part of their program, and it's something that we like to make fun of them about.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: I enjoyed listening to my colleague the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Many of the recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer are evident in this legislation—the one report that he filed in 2020, and he files other reports after provincial elections.

But when you look at one particular recommendation—Speaker, through you—the only tool that the Chief Electoral Officer has in his suite to drive compliance with elections laws are really minor infractions, not major. So one of his recommendations spoke about the ability to build into his work—

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

1420

Mr. Lorne Coe: Yes.

Would you be supportive of putting in place, as we do here—proposed changes—changes similar to what are in place in British Columbia and Alberta to drive compliance and improve the work of the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I must say, I'm not familiar with whatever the member has talked about that is in place in British Columbia and Alberta.

But I know that the Chief Electoral Officer, in the past, has been criticized for offering a less than adequate voters list, for example. I know plans are under way to improve the voters list. There is nothing more frustrating, as a candidate, to go to the door and find out that you're at the door where somebody lived three elections ago and the people have moved on. So we need a better voters list. Perhaps that could be tightened up at committee with this bill. That's just one example of how we can improve it.

Like I say, I'm all in favour of extending the advance polling, as well.

There are many things in the bill that are worth looking at and some that—just toss them out.

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: I want to thank my friend and my colleague for sharing his really important thoughts on this piece of legislation. One of the things I took from it most was the fact that at a time, right now, when people are facing some of the greatest economic devastation our province and this world have faced in more than a lifetime, we see the priority of the Conservative government being one in which they are focusing on increasing the ability for them to get more money out of their super-rich donors.

My question to the member is, what are the issues that you and your riding would like to have seen addressed by the Legislature, as opposed to increasing donation limits to the Conservative Party?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: That is a very good question.

My office is flooded each and every day with issues over vaccine rollout—who's going to get it? And when is their parent or their relative going to get it? Perhaps they have a child who is not as healthy as some other children, and they want to know if they can be looked after. People who go into long-term-care homes to look after their loved ones want to know if they can get it. People coming back across the border want to know how they can get it. So the vaccine is a huge issue.

I think there are so many COVID-19-related issues, such as when ServiceOntario was shut down and drivers' licences weren't available, health cards weren't available and birth certificates weren't available in a timely fashion. We are swamped with COVID-19-related issues.

And nobody has raised: "When are you going to bring in something so I can donate more money to political parties?"

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: We can all agree that we do not want our politics to become as adversarial as it is south of the border. I think much of the bitterness that we feel about politics stems from attack ads funded by faceless political action groups, pop-up organizations, unions and corporations. We want individuals to make a decision based on what each party stands for and based on their record.

It is concerning that a third party can spend unlimited funds for so long. This bill will change that by extending third-party advertising spending limits from six to 12 months before an election period.

My question to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh: Does the member opposite think it is democratic for corporations and pop-up political action groups to be able to spend unlimited sums of money for as long as they can currently? Yes or no?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: When I was going door to door in the last election, in the dying week, knocking on doors, people said, "I'm not sure about you anymore. I hear your leader believes in sanctuary cities across Ontario, where anybody crossing the border will be first in line to get a knee replacement, a hip replacement or treatment for cancer." Where the heck did that come from? That came from the Internet, from a third-party Conservative-supported think tank, without thinking—a think tank without brains to think with—that just started this thing, and it steamrolled. It might have cost me 12 or 20 votes; I don't know, but it cost me, and that fundraising went to that party and supported that government—to that group, in support of this party, which is now the government. That had no basis in fact at all, and yet we ran out of time to talk about it at the door. It just didn't make any sense. It came from nowhere.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's always an honour to rise in the House. Today I rise to speak on Bill 254, the elections act bill. I must admit I'm a bit perplexed about schedule 7 of the bill, and I'm a bit surprised that the government

would so significantly increase donation limits and reopen the door to pay-to-play politics, especially after the previous Liberal government took such a big hit on this issue.

I remember, back in the days when I would show up and have to sit up in the gallery, the issue of big money and politics was hounding the Liberal government, and one of the things I could always agree with the former Conservative members on is that Ontario's government should not be for sale and we should get big money out of politics.

That's why, when I read this bill, I was so surprised to see donation limits go from \$1,600 to \$3,300, which really—and this is so important—is actually going from \$4,800 to \$9,900, because a donor can donate \$3,300 to a party, \$3,300 to a riding association of that party and \$3,300 to a candidate of that party, for a total of \$9,900. How many Ontarians have \$9,900 lying around to donate to political parties? And what do they want for that donation?

It reminded me of a debate I had on TVO's *The Agenda* with a former Liberal finance minister about getting big money out of politics. This person was saying, "Political parties like ours need these big donations. Why do you want to do something that would hurt political parties?" I said to him—and I'll say this to the government today—that it's not about what's good for political parties; it's about what's good for the people of Ontario. Having low donation limits so that everyone has access to participate in the political system in a way that doesn't privilege people with deep pockets, I believe, is an important democratic principle. So it pains me to see the government reopening the door to pay-to-play politics—which brings me to my final point I want to make.

In addition to significantly raising the donation limits, the same section of the bill also doubles the amount of money an individual can donate to their campaign, from \$5,000 to \$10,000, and, to a leadership campaign, from \$25,000 to \$50,000. I'm wondering if this is about "for the people" or people with deep pockets.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member from Guelph for his comments. Of course, he will realize that the rules have changed and now corporate and union donations are no longer allowed. Those were the big donations. We're kind of in the middle of the pack. A couple of provinces don't even have limits on donations. It's all personal dollars—not some corporation.

I used to do fundraisers once a year—I haven't done one in years, but we used to do a golf tournament once a year for fundraising.

I want to ask you about the part to do with constituency associations for independent members—to make it fairer for them. We have a number of independent members in the Legislature now. Your thoughts on that?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question.

I remember I was the second witness at committee on the fundraising reform bill, because I had spoken out so strongly against union and corporate donations to political parties. I remember, when I came to committee, it was actually MPP Hillier who asked me a question that really gets at this point you've just made around making things fair for independent members.

1430

I certainly believe that the changes in this bill to make things fairer for a candidate who is not running as part of a party are a good step forward. But one good step forward doesn't outweigh opening the door to pay-to-play politics for deep-pocketed donors.

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Last night, I had the pleasure of joining the 12th Toronto Girl Guides meeting. We had a group of about 20 girls from Parkdale–High Park between the ages of nine to 11. They were talking about civic engagement, issues that are important to their community. They did presentations for me on the use of plastics, air pollution, safer schools, promoting arts and culture. These are the issues that the young people in my riding of Parkdale–High Park are talking about. These are the issues that matter; they want to see government take action on them.

I'd like to hear from the member from Guelph—what are the issues that he's hearing from the young people in his riding, when it comes to urgent action that the government needs to take? Is he hearing about changes to political donations as the top issue from young people?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'll be honest and say I haven't heard from anybody who wants to see donation limits increased. That was news to me when I read the bill—that that was something that the people of Ontario are really asking for.

What people in my riding are mostly talking about is—“What's the vaccine plan? When and how am I going to get a shot, and where do I fit into the prioritization schedule?” They want clarity on it.

People are talking about the need for a safe workplaces plan, because we know that's where most of the outbreaks are taking place. If we're going to avoid another lockdown, we have to make sure we have things like paid sick days and proper PPE for essential workers etc.

A lot of young people are telling me that we have to deal with this pandemic but that we also have to deal with another crisis, the climate crisis, which is barreling down on us, as well. They're deeply worried about—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): A quick question and comment? Further questions?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I agree with you that the priorities of this government seem to be completely backwards.

In my community, I see groups and not-for-profits struggling to raise money for food for communities. Hamilton Jewish Family Services are constantly fundraising for their food bank. Neighbour to Neighbour is another food bank in my riding that's struggling. Ancaster has a food drive every year, so the Ancaster Community

Food Drive has gone online. They're trying to raise donations for food in the community. One dollar equals one healthy meal.

When this is happening, when kids are going to school hungry, what do you think is in the mind of this government that this is what they're putting forward?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Again, I'll just respond to the member's question that I don't know anybody who is asking for donations to be increased. I'm assuming there are probably a few people around the province who have that kind of money sitting around to donate to political parties, but not very many.

As a matter of fact, most people I talk to, when it comes to political donations, are saying they should be lower than what they are, because we want to make sure we have equal access to politics. Politics is about all people, and not just the people with deep pockets.

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

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Usually, it's an honour to rise in this House to debate really important pieces of legislation. Today, it is embarrassing—in the middle of a pandemic, when the news this morning was full of the possibility of a third wave, based on one of the variants of concern that may take many more lives of Ontarians—to be standing up and be talking about election financing.

Just before I came into the House, I got a call from a close friend who told me that his father is in the hospital with COVID-19. His father is an older gentleman who is in poor health to start with. He has only one kidney, he's on dialysis, and he's not a robust man. When he called to tell his family this morning that he had tested positive—because they had to take him to the hospital yesterday; he was having trouble breathing. They thought maybe there was something else going on, that maybe it was pneumonia. They did a test this morning; he got the results back, and it's COVID-19. When he called to tell his family, he could hardly speak. He was wheezing so badly, he eventually had to drop the phone. You can imagine the impact on the family. His wife is terrified she will never have a conversation with her husband again. My friend is afraid that his father will never walk out of that hospital again. He's afraid that he won't be able to go and hold his hand and talk with him, or have a conversation at all.

In the last few weeks, his father hasn't gone out of the house very often, but he has gone out to do the occasional errand. What we will never know—and God forbid he should pass—is whether he got COVID-19 from somebody who had to go to work because they didn't have paid sick days. My friend will never know if his father's brush with death—because please, God, that he survives, but even if he does, he will have had a brush with death that he should not have had to have, and this family should not be going through what they are going through right now—

Interjections.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: —as my colleagues across the aisle pay no attention to what I'm saying, because if they were to, it would be deeply embarrassing that they

have a bill on election financing and raising election contribution limits while my friend's father is fighting for his life in a Mississauga hospital.

This should not be happening. None of this should be happening. They want to know whether the person he got it from was somebody working at a grocery store or an essential worker somewhere else, who couldn't stay home because they have a precarious job and they have no benefits—and if they do stay home, they might not be able to pay their rent. And if they can't pay their rent, there's no moratorium on evictions, so they might lose their housing. So they go to work. And now my friend's dad is fighting for his life. This is not okay.

He is, of course, not the only person in Ontario who is in this situation, and his family is not the only family in Ontario in this situation.

I think my colleagues across the aisle need to think long and hard about their priorities, about what we are talking about and about what we're not talking about in this very precious time.

Just to put this in perspective: Everybody who is in this House right now is taking a chance—that when we leave our homes and we come here, we're going to remain safe. We take this chance because we believe that it is important for us to keep democracy moving, yes, and to keep passing legislation and debating legislation and putting in place legislation that takes care of Ontarians, that protects Ontarians, not their electoral finances.

1440

But since we're talking about electoral finances, I would like to read into the record an editorial from the *Globe and Mail*, which, of course, is not exactly the bible of the progressive left. A couple of days ago, the editorial in the *Globe and Mail* said the following:

“We now take you back to the heady days of 2016, when it seemed for a brief, shining moment that an era of shameless political fundraising in Canada was on the wane.

“In May of that year,” the then “Liberal Premier of Ontario announced that her government would end the practice of selling private access to cabinet ministers and the Premier in return for five-figure donations from individuals, corporations and unions.

“It was naked influence-peddling.” The Premier's “ministers were given quotas and told to hit up wealthy stakeholders in the economic sectors affected by their departments; in exchange, donors were given face time with the person who controlled their regulatory fate.

“That ended with legislation that banned corporate and union donations. Henceforth, only individuals would be allowed to donate, and the annual donation limit was reduced from \$33,250 to \$3,600. The law also provided for a per vote subsidy for parties to help them get over the hump created by their new inability to peddle access.”

The editorial goes on to talk about what happens in different parts of the province, but then it returns to Ontario:

“And now Ontario, once a harbinger of a more democratic politics, is at growing risk of bringing back the

seedy practice of cash for access. In 2018,” the Premier “increased the total donation limit to \$4,800 from \$3,600, and scrapped the part of the 2016 law that banned MPPs from attending fundraising events.

“His government also removed a rule that obliged individuals to attest that the money they donated was their own, raising fears of forbidden corporate and union money coming in through a loophole. And now his government has tabled legislation to double the individual donation limit.

“In Alberta, the province has upped the individual limit for municipal elections to \$5,000 per candidate, with no limit on the number of candidates one person can donate to. It presents new opportunities for well-heeled donors seeking favourable decisions at city hall.”

Here's the piece I hope that my colleagues across the aisle are listening to:

“Money can be toxic in a democracy, and as always the dose makes the poison. As long as individuals can continue to donate thousands of dollars, there will be the perception—and very real possibility—of the buying and selling of influence.

“This page has long advocated for the coast-to-coast adoption of Quebec's \$100 limit. Five years ago, elections and governments in too many parts of the country were compromised by their dependence on union and corporate money. The problem was tackled, thanks to public pressure. The next battle begins.”

This is important, because I want us to consider who can afford to pay this new elevated, doubled limit that the government is putting in place with this legislation.

I heard one of the government members, earlier today, speaking about how the government believes that elections should be decided by voters and not by third-party advertisers. The question comes: Which voters? Which voters will decide? And how will that be decided?

I'll tell you who can't afford this new elevated limit. I'll tell you who can't afford to pay \$3,300. Let me tell you a story. My riding of Beaches–East York is a riding that, for those of you who don't know, is socioeconomically very mixed. There are parts of the riding that are reasonably well off, small parts that are quite well off and some parts of the riding that have among the deepest pockets of poverty in the city, where the poverty is as deep as anywhere in the city. Those are the pockets of the ridings that have been the hardest hit by COVID-19. These are the neighbourhoods where the COVID numbers have been very high for a number of reasons, partly because there are a significant number of essential front-line workers, most of whom do not have benefits, most of whom do not have paid sick days.

The folks in this pocket live in high-rises where there might be four elevators and, on every given day, a couple of them aren't working. You have to wait a while for the elevator. You have no choice but to go up very close and packed in with your neighbours. These are apartments where often people live in multi-generational families. Many of them are Black or Indigenous or other people of colour. Many of them are immigrants. They hold down the

jobs that don't allow them to stay home. If somebody does become ill, there is nowhere to self-isolate, and so their rates of COVID are high.

Dozens of hard-working families in this pocket of my riding are currently facing eviction hearings because they lost income due to COVID. Through no fault of their own, they lost income due to COVID, and their corporate landlords are intent on seeing business as usual and are not making allowances for them, because their inability to pay their rent or to be able to repay all of their arrears had to do with COVID. The arguments that they've put forward at the Landlord and Tenant Board are, "You know, there have been reasons before that people have lost their income. There's nothing we can do about that. We still want our rent and we want our arrears." This is an ongoing issue.

These particular neighbours, these dozens of families, have come together and have actually gained the ability at the LTB of having their cases heard all together, in a consolidated way. So they will have a lawyer, they will have a full defence and they will make the case that it is severely problematic for the landlord to act as though it's business as usual, when we are in the middle of the most severe social and economic crisis since the Depression, which has particularly affected and impacted BIPOC and immigrant communities—and also, by the way, many disabled folks, who also live in these buildings and run the risk now of finding themselves on the street.

So that is happening. These neighbours, in particular, through me, and also neighbours in similar situations, through my colleagues, have asked the government, begged the government, pleaded with the government over and over and over again to understand the particular plight that they are in, to understand how devastating it is to have run through whatever savings they had trying to pay their arrears, even if they managed to get their job back after they lost it in the first wave only to lose it again in the second wave and doing everything they can to hang on to their housing.

1450

It's affected their health. There are people now who are on additional medications for stress among these dozens of neighbours, which is costing them yet more of whatever precious income they have, and they're still in danger of being tossed out onto the street. They have begged the government, through me and my colleagues, to please pass a real moratorium on evictions, give them paid sick days so that they can stay home when they're sick and know that they're going to be able to pay their rent. They have begged, they have pleaded, and they have run into a stone wall that feels cruel to them and feels uncaring to them. They can't afford \$3,300 in election contributions. My friend whose father fell ill and who's fighting for his life as we speak in a hospital—their family can't afford \$3,300 in election contributions.

This morning, we were talking about the Financial Accountability Office's findings that the government is spending less on ending homelessness in the middle of a pandemic that is pushing people onto the street than it has

in the past five years. How? Those folks can't afford \$3,300 in political donations.

I think the government members need to think very carefully about what it says about them and their priorities, that in the middle of a pandemic that has hit some people and some communities really, really hard while, frankly, making a lot of money for others—bank shares are hitting all-time highs; my neighbours in Crescent Town don't hold bank shares. Who is benefiting? What does it say about which voters will be able to give these enhanced contribution amounts and which will not? What does it say about the party that, in the middle of a pandemic, is concerned with lining its pockets instead of giving paid sick days to people who can't stay home when they're sick and who may be the reason that the father of a friend of mine is fighting for his life?

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I thank the member from Beaches—East York for the comments she raised. There is so much that we could have put in this bill, as we've heard, and then they criticize us because it's a pandemic. You plan today for tomorrow, for the future. If we put a lot of stuff in that you had talked about, then we would have been accused of actually developing or writing an omnibus bill.

I've heard primarily one major concern from the official opposition as well, and that is that they object to the increase in personal donations. It's an increase, okay? People will donate what they want to donate. So having said that, would the member from Beaches—East York agree that the idea to guard against the threat of collusion between parties, candidates and so on—would you agree with that?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: The essential point is that we shouldn't be talking about any of this at all right now—none of it. We shouldn't be talking about election financing at all in the middle of a pandemic.

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I'd like to thank my colleague for her passionate presentation. The member is aware that today, the Financial Accountability Office released a report on the state of housing and homelessness in Ontario. It's very clear from this report that the Conservative government is failing to address Ontario's housing and homelessness crises, and instead of taking action on these issues, here we are debating an election financing bill.

I would like to ask the member to share with this House, what are some of the things that we propose the government do in order to address the crisis of homelessness and housing in Ontario?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Thank you so much to my colleague from Parkdale—High Park for the question. This is exactly the point. This is what we should be talking about. We should be talking about how to end the homelessness. We should be talking about how to make sure to keep people housed. We should be talking about the really crucial issues of housing. And there are so many proposals that we keep making.

We have long declared homelessness an emergency and argue that that's happening because there's a housing crisis, because governments, for decades now, have not been building enough affordable housing—not just dribs and drabs, but sufficient amounts of affordable housing. We need to step up and make sure that that housing is there. We also need the supportive and transitional housing that folks need when they are transitioning back into being housed.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: To the member opposite: This legislation will accomplish something that has been overlooked in Ontario for many years, and that is creating a more level playing field by providing all elected sitting independent members of provincial Parliament and independent candidates elected as independent members with access to constituency associations and related benefits, such as fundraising outside of election periods, qualifying for constituency association voter subsidies and keeping surpluses. Will the member opposite and their party join the government in giving all members of this House a fair shot at running in the next election?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Here we go with the tidbits again. In every piece of legislation that the government puts forth, there are the tidbits that are not terrible. But the point remains that discussing the tidbits that are not terrible takes away from the fundamental point that we should not be having this conversation at all in the middle of a pandemic.

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Thank you so much for that really impassioned and powerful presentation. You articulated and described a lot of the issues that the riding that you represent is facing right now. It's a very tone deaf piece of legislation coming from the government right now, and the fact that they're prioritizing increasing limits to donations as opposed to dealing with the crises created by COVID-19.

What are the issues that are currently top of mind for you in your riding? The people that you represent: What are they facing right now? And what can we do to address that, or what should government be doing to address that?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Thank you so much for the question. I think, top of mind, apart from the question of housing and the real desperation that people are feeling to stay housed, next week, I'm going to be debating my private member's motion, which will be a request for rent relief to ensure that nobody loses their housing because they couldn't pay their rent or their arrears. And so, it's a request for the government to step up and to, themselves and/or with corporations, ensure that nobody loses their housing.

1500

Another piece that so many people in my riding care about is the question of the vaccine rollout. That is top-of-mind for everybody, regardless of their socio-economic status or their housing status—

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

Further questions?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Back to the member opposite: It's very frustrating on this side to be accused or attacked for not focusing on only one issue today. But the world goes on; governments have to continue.

Today, one of our ministers, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, announced half a billion dollars that has been given to municipalities to help municipalities address COVID issues. That's something that we did just today. I know that in my city of Hamilton we received \$18 million, and they can use it towards, perhaps, implementing the rollout of the vaccine or any other additional costs associated with COVID-19 that they've had to absorb.

We are still continuing to govern, while addressing all of the issues and challenges brought forward by the pandemic. But to make any changes like the one we just talked about helping independent parties, we have to introduce that legislation long before an election. Do you not want to see that change take place? And, if so, you have to support this piece of legislation—

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

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: The topic of discussion here—if only it were the government contributions to municipalities and whether they are sufficient, because that's something that municipalities have a lot to say about. That's something that small business has a lot to say about. But that's not the topic of discussion. The topic of discussion is not the thing that is uppermost in people's minds and that is keeping them awake at night with stress.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much for that informative and impassioned speech. I just wish that the government was listening to what you were putting forward, because that's what people care about and that's what they're struggling with. I mean, the member from Flamborough—Glanbrook just said, "The world goes on," but it doesn't go on for some people in your community. Can you just talk a little bit about how this is truly a "let them eat cake" Marie Antoinette moment for this government?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Thank you so much to—
Interjection.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: —my colleague, yes, with the very long riding name.

But that's exactly the point: that the world goes on is exactly what the corporate landlords are saying when they say, "People always have trouble paying their rent, so what's different now?"

This is, in a nutshell, what we are busy discussing here. For many people, the world is not just carrying on its merry way. For many people who are about to lose a loved one in a hospital, who are terrified that they're losing their housing, who are losing their health, the world isn't just carrying on. The world is coming to some kind of a terrible

crisis in which, yes, they're going to keep breathing, but the trauma that they are experiencing and that is being made worse by the cruelty and uncaringness of this government is going to haunt them, their families and their communities for a very, very long time.

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Good afternoon. I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 254. As is typical of this government, the title of the bill has little to do with the contents of the proposed legislation. The bill is entitled Protecting Ontario Elections Act, but should probably be called "protecting the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party and its insider friends and lobbyists act."

There are three sections of the proposed legislation that I will spend my limited time discussing today, and one aspect of the bill for what it does not include. I will focus on schedule 1, regarding the advisory committee on voting equipment; schedule 2, specifically the taxpayer funding of political parties; as well as the provision that allows for double-dipping of taxpayer funding of political parties, as well as independent MPPs, on the same vote total; and, finally, I will discuss what this bill does not include: any aspects of Bill 150, ensuring transparency and accountability in political party elections, which would make it illegal to commit electoral fraud in a party election but which this government refuses to support and has parked at committee for over a year.

Working backwards, let's start with what this bill does not include. If this government was really concerned with protecting elections, they wouldn't have parked proposed legislation Bill 150 in committee for more than a year. The government would have taken the provisions of that bill and included it in Bill 254 if they were concerned with protecting elections.

That bill, Bill 150, calls for fraudulent conduct in political party elections to be outlawed and punished. Currently, there are no laws in Ontario that make electoral fraud in a political party election illegal, yet this government doesn't seem to think that's a problem. During debate on Bill 150, the government said that when it comes to fraud, political parties should operate above the law and in a vacuum. Political parties get to make up their own rules, and that goes for the operatives as well. If one person in Ontario walked into an internal party election and committed fraud, in our system of government, there isn't anything that anyone can say or do. And the government has stated that that is acceptable.

Yet that is not the position of this government in this bill. While claiming that when it comes to electoral fraud in political parties, their operatives should not be subject to any laws, in this bill the government is proposing a series of laws that political parties should be subject to. The government believes that political parties should be subject to donation limits from donors, disclosure requirements on donations, the disclosure of income and expense statements regarding elections, as well as having the law apply audit requirements on all such statements.

Yet the government doesn't want to see public disclosure of electoral results for internal party elections as proposed in Bill 150. The government doesn't seem interested in governing how ballots are cast in internal party elections as proposed in Bill 150 but are perfectly comfortable setting laws to oversee how donations are handled. So when it comes to electoral fraud for internal party elections, this government has made its position clear: Political parties or bad actors should not be subject to any standard on fraudulent voting.

From this bill it is clear that the government does not have any rationale or reason behind proposing laws that govern how political parties operate in this bill, Bill 254, but in the same breath rejects laws on electoral fraud proposed in Bill 150. It is a mystery as to why this government is so adamantly against creating electoral fraud laws. One can only speculate it has something to do with the series of nominations that were subject to complaints of irregularities and electoral fraud that occurred from 2016 to 2018, a time when many of the current government MPPs were involved in such nominations that resulted in controversy. Or perhaps the government doesn't like the statement of claim that arose as a result of the Ontario PC Party's 2018 convention, whereby it is alleged that more ballots were counted than voters that voted in an election that selected the government's party president, Brian Patterson, and first vice-president, lobbyist Chris Loreto, as well as two other people on the party executive.

Now, since this Bill 254 is about political party elections, I think it is important to put this into context, because the next section of the bill I am going to discuss is on the taxpayer funding of political parties. As mentioned, the government's political party, the Ontario PC Party, which all government MPPs belong to, is currently being run by a president and a vice-president who got their positions from what a statement of claim in court alleges was an election that resulted in more ballots being counted than voters who voted. After my removal from the government caucus, that same party executive expelled 20 people, an entire board, from a local Ontario PC riding association without following its party's own rules and without providing any rationale.

So what does this government think is the appropriate response to allegations of electoral fraud choosing who runs their political party, the Ontario PC Party? This government believes the appropriate response is not to set in place rules against electoral fraud or to get to the bottom of what happened; no. This government believes they should be rewarding this behaviour by funnelling into Ontario PC Party coffers over \$5 million of taxpayer money to help fund their party's operations.

This bill proposes to change this very government's own legislation that promised to wind down the taxpayer subsidy of political parties. There was a time when this government and the Premier were against taxpayer subsidization of political parties. They boasted, complete with grandstanding, that they were defending the taxpayer, the little guy. The per-vote taxpayer subsidy has ended. It doesn't exist, but apparently the government doesn't feel

two years of the Ontario PC Party continuing to receive taxpayer subsidies has been enough. They want more money and more time.

So this schedule asks for the subsidy to be increased from 0.452 cents per vote earned to 0.636 cents. That's a 40% increase that will net the Ontario PC Party over \$5 million a year until the next election. Let's put this in perspective, Speaker. At the same time this government has locked our economy down for a year, put small business owners out of work, prevented people from going to work, prevented churches from congregating, going after churches in court for fines and legal fees to keep them shut down, while all of that is going on and people are worse off and poorer, and poorer as a result of the government's lockdown, the government not only believes its Ontario PC Party should keep getting taxpayer money from its operations, this government believes they deserve a 40% raise—even more money.

1510

One can only conclude that fundraising is going down for the Ontario PC Party. The cats running the show are struggling to bring in money for their lobbyist friends who run the executive and need political contracts to feast off, so they need taxpayer money to the tune of over \$5 million a year.

It is truly a cynical and disgusting move by this government, not only because of the timing, but also because it is wrong for the taxpayer to fund political parties. Seemingly, some speechwriter in the government agrees, for it was just a couple of years ago that the Premier was scripted to say this on a social media thread: “When I am elected Premier I will stand up for all Ontario taxpayers and eliminate the per-vote subsidy given to political parties in Ontario.... If a party cannot raise its own money to run its campaign, it will no longer be able to rely on the government to get it from the taxpayer.” Sound familiar?

The Premier added, “In 2017, the Ontario government paid almost \$13 million to political parties at the expense of Ontario taxpayers, through a mandated per-vote subsidy....

“Another \$4 million went to the Ontario PC Party—much of which was used to sue our own party members and settle court cases relating to troubling nominations”—the Premier's own words.

“I do not believe the government should be taking money from hard-working taxpayers and giving it to political parties. Corporate welfare is wrong,” the Premier said, “and political party welfare is equally wrong; I will put an end to both.”

The Premier called taxpayer funding of political parties “political welfare.” He said the money was used to sue people. This promise went on to become a PC Party election promise. But here we are, three years later: another promise made and promise broken by this Premier and his PC government.

It's hard to find any promises the Premier and this government made that they have kept in an ocean of their ever-shifting and changing positions on policy over the last two years.

Two years later, almost to the day, the Premier and his government proposed not only to bring it back, but they're also increasing it. So \$4 million wasn't enough for the PC Party. They want more than \$5 million.

The cats of lobbyists and insiders running the PC Party are getting hungry, it seems. This isn't stopping the gravy train; with this bill, the Premier has proven he is the architect of that gravy train. It is no wonder voters are losing respect for us in political office. They don't trust what we tell them, whether it's on COVID-19 statistics or the reasons for certain policies. When you have a Premier who, in February 2018, called taxpayer subsidization of political parties “political welfare” and, 24 months later—two years later almost to the day—calls to bring it back and increase the subsidy, what trust can there be between voters and their politicians?

It should also be on the record that the taxpayer subsidy is not for all registered political parties, but only for the main parties. Those parties that received a certain vote share from the last election will receive taxpayer money to pay for their operations. New parties or parties that did not perform as well do not receive any subsidy from the taxpayer.

What does the taxpayer subsidy then do? The effect is not to get big money out of politics—no. The effect of the subsidy is to keep the establishment parties well funded and provide them an advantage over any new or up-and-coming parties, or parties that threaten the status quo.

Clearly, this government is afraid of some new party if it has decided to give its own party over \$5 million. It needs a head start over other, smaller parties. That is the confidence they are showing in their own prospects going forward.

The taxpayer subsidization of political parties is wrong and should be ended immediately, not increased.

In addition, I'd like to bring to your attention the other element of the bill that allows for independent MPPs to collect taxpayer subsidies. There are two problems with this provision.

First of all, the bill is proposing to change the Election Finances Act so that only independents who are in the Legislature will be able to set up a constituency association to raise money. Anyone looking to run as an independent against an incumbent independent MPP will not be able to raise money until the writ.

Second, independent MPPs are now able to collect taxpayer subsidies for their prior vote total, even if that vote total came under the banner of a political party they no longer belong to. But the bill does not allow for taxpayer subsidization of anyone running as an independent—or, in my situation, after being ejected from the government caucus and ejected from the Ontario PC Party. I have founded a new party, but because I am part of a new party, I don't receive a taxpayer subsidy. Only MPPs who remain independent after being ejected from a party caucus can get the taxpayer subsidy.

Why would the government draft the bill in this way? Why give a benefit to independent MPPs who are independent only because the government has ejected them

from caucus, but not to anyone running against an independent or an MPP who, after being ejected, decides to start a new party?

Personally, I don't know how bills can be drafted in such a fashion that targets negatively one MPP, such as myself, but provides an advantage to every other MPP. Such a bill should be deemed out of order on those grounds alone—for the unequal application of the use of taxpayer funding. If anyone were to take the provision to court, I'm sure it would fail.

Does the government have a legal opinion on this? Is it acceptable to confer an advantage to elected independent MPPs over others who seek to run against them when it comes to raising money, or to independent MPPs who remain independents as opposed to starting a new party?

I must say, if the government is that threatened by my standing in this Legislature as a member of the New Blue Party of Ontario, all I can do is blush with humility.

In addition, the other problematic provision of this carve-out for independents is the double-dipping nature of the use of taxpayer money. In the section that allows independent MPPs to receive taxpayer subsidization for their constituency associations, the government is proposing that the political party under which the independent MPP was elected should also receive a subsidy for the vote total.

Listen to how ridiculous this is, Speaker. This provision would allow an MPP who is elected under the Ontario PC banner, for example, and then is ejected from the caucus and sits as an independent and they don't want to join another party—this government will now allow that independent MPP to receive a taxpayer subsidy for their constituency association, but the government is also giving the Ontario PC Party taxpayer subsidy based on the same vote total the independent MPP received while running under that party's banner.

Why should the Ontario PC Party get a subsidy? Didn't the government make it clear in the expulsion of that MPP that they wanted nothing to do with them? In this case, it isn't just political welfare; it is double-dipping into the taxpayer pool of money so that the Ontario PC Party can do what it wants and still get as much money into its coffers as possible. Once again, the Premier and this government show in the bill that they are architects of the gravy train.

Finally, my last comments are on the creation of a committee to advise on the use and standards of voting machines.

I, for one, was confused during the last election with the use of new voting machines. The confusion was the lack of transparency that existed for my scrutineers. Most scrutineers were getting ready to scrutinize and have a look at the ballots cast at their polling station, count each ballot and come up with a tally, but at some polling stations, machines were used where the ballots were fed, the result came out and that was that—no examination of ballots, no counting. Not only did it take the fun out of the exercise, but scrutineers and candidates had to put their entire faith in whatever the machine was doing. I was

confused, because I wasn't aware of any mass public policy reason for using such machines. There weren't many complaints that I know of about vote-counting by people that took too long from prior elections. It seemed that people who participated in those elections in the past felt that the counting went smoothly. Counting at a poll usually wouldn't take more than an hour if these new machines were ushered in.

And it seems at the time the government, while running in opposition, had concerns as well. When they were in opposition, the government's party lawyer, Arthur Hamilton, wrote to Elections Ontario to raise several issues on the use of voting machines, including concerns about protection from hacking and certification of vote counting.

But here we are, Madam Speaker, two years later, and seemingly the government isn't concerned anymore and wants to have a committee to explore further use of voting machines.

I don't see why we need a committee to examine the use the voting machines that cost Ontario taxpayers millions of dollars, to solve a problem that doesn't exist. That is why, instead of a committee, we should go back to scrapping the use of voting machines and have ballots counted the trusted and old-fashioned way by the very people we are holding the elections for in the first place.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for her speech, comments and thoughts.

I have a question with regard to the technology aspect she was talking about in the midst of her speech. Of course, the Chief Electoral Officer has made the recommendation, which has been taken up by the government in this bill, to look at adopting technology, which changes all the time and changes between elections. So he is recommending a committee be made up of representatives of all parties and also with some experts who would continue to review technology for use in Ontario elections. I'm wondering how the member feels about that.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka for his question.

Where is the policy on this? Where was the outcry on this? If we're building laws as a government should be, where is this coming from? You're saying Elections Ontario recommended it. What is the recommendation? Are we saving money? Is it more accurate? What benefit is it to the people of Ontario?

Scrutineering in person has been done well for years. It hasn't taken as long.

People need to feel confident in the votes they're providing when they're electing people to run their province or their country.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I really enjoy listening to my friend from Cambridge. I like to watch her former colleagues in the Conservative Party as they shiver and tremble. They're never sure just how far she'll go in

revealing her inside information on party financing and nomination scandals. It's really quite entertaining—her rapid-fire presentation, point after point. I can't wait for her book to come out. I think it'll be fascinating reading.

My question is regarding Bill 254 and the contrary positions of the Conservatives over taxpayer subsidies for electoral financing. Why does she think that her former party needs to double the current limit of political donations?

1520

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. I can assure you that no book will be coming out any time soon. My purpose right now is for the people of Cambridge.

It's a great question he has asked, Madam Speaker, in that, could it be that donations are so low right now because of the rubbish job that's being done in government—that they now have to raise that donation threshold in order to make up for lost ground? It could be that—or potentially other new political parties, like the New Blue Party of Ontario, that will be taking some of that money off of their former political base.

At a time like this, when people are struggling on top of that to have their jobs, because the economy has been shut down by the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario—and now we're asking them to cough up more dollars to support a party which hasn't kept any of their promises since they've been elected. It's quite unfortunate—to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh—and it is very peculiar that they introduced something at a time like this.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: In fact, the member from Cambridge, in response to my last question—I asked about technology and she said, “What good is it?” First of all, it's coming from the special report from the Chief Electoral Officer on adapting to COVID-19, and it's from reports before that. I would think somebody with disabilities, for example, could use technology to be able to vote where they otherwise might not be able to vote.

Another recommendation from his report that has been adopted by the government, and relates to COVID-19, is providing for five more flexible advance poll days. Certainly, that's important in my riding, which is a huge geographic area—to allow people the ability to vote, and also reduce the numbers of people voting at one time.

I just wonder how the member feels about those changes recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you again to the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

It's interesting; yes, we always want to be accommodating to anyone who has any type of disability. It's interesting to hear it coming from a government member, when they put through standing orders that preclude anyone from wearing anything other than a cloth mask, even if they have a disability. It's interesting to hear that coming from the government side, because it would seem to me that there is no care for those who might have any type of disability, seen or unseen.

Going back to voting and the purpose of Bill 254: I think more voting days are great, but at the end of the day, the people of Ontario need to be able to trust the process and trust their politicians. If those things are lacking, then that is the problem. We need to be working on trust. Can you trust the machines? I don't know. We need to figure that out, because from the last election we did see a lot of trouble with a lot of these polling machines. And south of the border, as one of the members mentioned before, there were issues, as well.

Again, this is something that we need to be listening to the public about and not just the Chief Electoral Officer—

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: I'll end it there. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: I want to thank the member from Cambridge for a very impassioned overview of the inner workings of her previous caucus members and perhaps some of the motivations for why this bill is coming forward, as well. I wanted to pick up on some of that.

As we heard from the member, what we've seen from this government is a number of promises made but perhaps not kept. Here's another example of that.

I wonder if the member from Cambridge could help enlighten the House in terms of why this government would be bringing this bill forward and why, yet again, despite making promises during the 2018 campaign, this government is now backpedalling on the promises it made to Ontarians.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member from Brampton Centre for that question.

The only thing that many people can think of right now is that governing by polls is what's happening. That is not the way to run a province.

This elections bill could have been so much more. They talked about not interfering with political parties in the past. I mentioned my Bill 150—now we are doing things in this elections bill that “interferes” with political parties and how things are done.

There is nothing in this bill that is allowing for transparency to occur in internal party elections—transparency, which was a key platform in the election.

Ending the voter subsidy—again, a big part of the election platform. Why has that been walked back? Why are we denying that these voter subsidies need to end, that internal party election clarity and transparency need to happen? What has happened to this party?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question? The member from Perth–Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to ask a question to the member from Cambridge. I picked up some of what she was saying; I don't listen that fast, so I'm going to get the Hansard transcript so that I can catch all of what she was trying to say. I believe Mr. Walker has been quite jealous of what she did.

Failing to register the release of the election surveys on polling day, failure to submit other reports—these are the types of infractions that Ontario’s Chief Electoral Officer is asking to drive compliance on, through the use of an administrative monetary penalty regime.

Will the member support expanding the Chief Electoral Officer’s work and enforcement powers? If not, why? Could she give me her thoughts on that?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member for Perth–Wellington. I won’t speak that quickly for my answer.

I approve of anything to do with transparency. If we are being more transparent, if there’s clarity with things—that is something we should always be looking to improve upon. But as members of the opposition have mentioned, you unfortunately can’t just pick certain parts of the bill and vote yes on those parts and no on other parts; that’s not how it works. It’s packaged as a whole.

Unless this bill goes to committee and it amends many things, like putting in the stipulations of Bill 150, removing the per-vote subsidy and including other aspects of the bill—then it would be much more palatable and easier to vote for. But quite frankly, there’s a mishmash of things in here. Yes, transparency is very, very important, and I approve of that. But there are other aspects of this bill that, I am sorry, I just cannot support.

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

Ms. Lindsey Park: I’ll be sharing my time with the member for Northumberland–Peterborough South.

It’s a pleasure to rise in the House today for second reading of Bill 254, the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, 2021. This bill is an effort to protect Ontarians’ voices in provincial elections. It’s crucial that Elections Ontario, political parties and their candidates are equipped to meet urgent challenges presented by COVID-19 and any future challenges we face as a province. Most significantly, the act will make it easier and safer for people to vote and will protect provincial elections against outside influence and interference.

Bill 254 is about ensuring that individuals remain at the centre of the electoral process. It is our belief that Ontario voters should determine the outcome of elections—not big corporations, not unions, not American-style political action groups or other outside influences. This is about preserving Ontarians’ essential voice in campaigns and ensuring Ontarians can vote safely, both in advance polls and on election day, especially in a COVID-19 environment.

The act is meant to guard against threats, including ongoing detrimental impacts of the pandemic, under-regulated third-party advertising and irregular campaign spending and collusion between parties and organizations—the very things that, if left unchecked, can threaten the democratic process on which Ontarians rely to choose those who will govern.

Specifically, 19 legislative amendments are presented in Bill 254 to safeguard our elections. Among these notable changes are the increasing of advance polling

days, from five to 10. These are changes initially proposed by Ontario’s Chief Electoral Officer, which we are now proposing be adopted and implemented. In fact, several of the proposed reforms fulfill recommendations of Ontario’s Chief Electoral Officer, from a special report of November 2020 on election administration in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Why does he say we need these changes? In the Chief Electoral Officer’s words, “It’s critical that Elections Ontario be ready to deliver an election that protects both the integrity of the vote and the health and safety of voters and our staff.”

1530

If passed, this amendment to increase advance poll days means Ontario would have the greatest number of advance polling days among the provinces and the federal government, with other provinces having two to eight advance poll days and Canada having four. Holding more advance polls promotes social distancing during and immediately after the pandemic.

Changes proposed by the act promote compliance with practices we have all become accustomed to in preventing the spread of COVID-19. Not only will populations be spread among a greater number of advance poll days, but crowding at poll stations on election day would be significantly reduced, as Ontarians will be voting in person in lower numbers when election day arrives.

I do want to note: We have seen in three recent provincial elections in Canada that, actually, in these pandemic elections, more people voted in advance polls than on election day. So I think this change reflects what we’re seeing Canada-wide.

COVID-19 and its impact on elections across Canada and around the world sheds light on the importance of ensuring elections are accessible and safe, including for those in northern and rural communities. This increase to advance poll days is about offering greater flexibility based on need, particularly in those communities that are more remote. Those Ontarians who work on shift work and do not work during standard workweek hours can have greater options as to when they cast their vote as well.

Further, by doubling the number of advance poll days, the opportunity for voting would be increased, and young voters would be among those who would benefit from this change. The change would make more advance poll days available to college and university students who are not registered to vote in the city where they attend school, but can vote when home in their riding on a weekend or school break before election day. Voting may not be top of mind for these young people when they’re living in an alternate city for school or for work, and this is an essential change to facilitate voter turnout for that demographic, by providing more advance poll options.

The change proposed to the per-vote subsidy for Ontario elections acknowledges the drastic changes the COVID-19 pandemic has brought, and the aftermath it will have on political fundraising. The section of the Election Act pertaining to the per-vote subsidy was repealed in a pre-pandemic context where the expectation

arising from the debate in this place was that this would empower political actors to have increased engagement with the voting public, rather than to be cut a cheque quarterly, regardless of your level of engagement in your community.

Currently, the per-vote subsidy would decline to 45 cents quarterly this year and be eliminated in 2022. The amendments we propose in this bill will allow us to avoid this. Obviously, times have changed since we last had the debate in the Legislature, and party and riding associations have not been able to engage with their constituents in the way that they had been able to since COVID-19. We all know how our roles have changed over the last year, and this change in this bill reflects that.

Amendments to the Election Act would extend the per-vote subsidies each party typically receives until December 31, 2024, and it would be held at the 2018 rate of 63 cents per vote quarterly. Extending this subsidy would provide some relief and certainty to local constituency associations, given the financial repercussions of the last year.

This bill also proposes changes to Ontario's rules about third parties, with an aim of keeping Ontarians at the centre of deciding who governs in this province—not American-style third parties. With the proposed changes, the third-party advertising spending limit of \$600,000 would remain the same, but the period of time during which the spending limit is imposed would be extended.

Where that spending limit currently applies six months before the writ, it would now apply 12 months prior to the writ. This extension of the timing is a practical approach to combatting the unfettered use of unchecked, American-style third-party advertising in campaigns by having the monetary limit on spending apply for a longer period leading up to the election.

Elections Ontario has reported that the scale of third-party advertising in Ontario is actually greater than that at the federal level, and Ontario is the only province in Canada where third-party spending is counted in the millions of dollars rather than in the thousands.

From these statistics alone, it's fair to say that further limits are needed. These changes will build on prior reforms in clarifying rules and closing perceived loopholes. It's important Ontario elections are distinguished from some of the tactics we see across the border and that they remain focused on the ideals of the people.

In addition, to target undue external influence on campaigns, a definition of "collusion" is contained in the act to help protect Ontarians from such interference and guard against third parties coordinating messaging with political parties. This effort is closely aligned with preserving our most basic and cherished democratic right: to vote freely and participate in the election of our government. It is this preservation of safe voting in Ontario elections that the act seeks to uphold.

The act also clarifies rules pertaining to MPP's social media accounts, and I'm very pleased to see this and see our province as a leader in this space—the first, as far as I know, in Canada to start to define some rules around how

we use social media accounts—specifically, our ability to maintain individual accounts before, during and after the writ period.

The standard to be confirmed on passage of this act is that individual members can maintain a single consistent social media presence before, during and after the election period as long as the author follows the appropriate rules and guidance at the time of the posting. So whatever role you hold at the time you post, those are the rules that apply. As we know, this is a practice that's currently lacking in rules.

With social media being a vital aspect in campaign visibility and messaging in our modern age, this clarification will help every person involved in Ontario in campaigning. Staff and candidates alike can be better assured that their posts, their images and wording appropriately comply with Legislative Assembly guidelines and Ontario electoral rules.

This proposal also allows the Legislative Assembly to lay a foundation for setting clear rules for all politicians using social media platforms going forward. I think that's an important discussion for us to have with all parties at the table in this place. As I said, no other Canadian jurisdiction has a statutory or a regulatory provision governing social media use by members of an assembly, yet it's such an important aspect of today's communications inside and outside of election campaigns. I'm really pleased Bill 254 will facilitate Ontario's leadership in this area.

Overall, we present this bill and the proposed changes and developments at a critical time as we take steps towards Ontario's recovery. Individuals and families across Ontario rely on a secure, safe electoral process that offers them the chance to have a fair say in the representation they seek. That must be fiercely defended.

I urge all members to support these changes and vote in support of Bill 254. I look forward to hearing the rest of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South.

Mr. David Piccini: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise today to speak to this important piece of legislation. I thank the member for Durham for sharing her time with me to speak to this today.

I want to zero in on a few important elements of this legislation. Specifically, I'd like to talk a bit about advance polling. Coming from a rural riding like Northumberland–Peterborough South—larger than Belgium, larger than most European countries—this is significantly important; and then, if I have a little time, to talk about the influence of American-style politics in Canada, third-party, PAC-style advertising that is contributing to a polarization of discourse. So I'll address that.

1540

But I'll first start just overall: Protecting Ontarians' voice in campaigns is critical. Leading and listening to the recommendations of Ontario's Chief Electoral Officer to make it easier to vote is essential in our democracy. I know that the measures proposed here on advance polling are

critical to increasing the accessibility and access for Ontarians to cast their ballot and have a say in our democratic process.

I think, Madam Speaker, it's important to look through the COVID pandemic. None of us could have expected we would find ourselves in this pandemic when we were first elected in 2018, but here we are. With an election on the not-so-distant horizon, it's important that we act now to ensure that Ontarians have increased access to the ballot box.

I have some family and friends in Newfoundland and I paid close attention to that election. I'd like to quote a headline from the Newfoundland and Labrador Independent. It said, "2021 NL Election in Chaos as COVID Cases Rise." The Chief Electoral Officer was quoted in that article saying that results might not be revealed until April. That's why I feel it is so important that we act now to avoid those sorts of situations.

Madam Speaker, by extending the advance polls from five to 10 days, we're going to help ensure that Ontarians can feel safe going to the ballot box. We know that physical distancing and the need to maintain a distance right now under the current public health guidelines are essential.

You know, I think fondly back to my election. I remember I cast my ballot, of course, in an advance poll; I know many in this place were no doubt quite busy on election day trying to get out their vote, calling volunteers, thanking them, bringing coffee, being told by their campaign managers to get out of that campaign office and get out there to get the vote out.

When I think to some of the lineups at the Cobourg Community Centre, when I think of Norwood, the lineups there—I remember getting a text message and a picture from one of the young gentlemen who worked on my campaign, Mike, who knocked on almost as many doors as me. Mike sent me a picture. It was a great picture, because we knew our get-out-the-vote efforts were working, but it was a long line, long, way outside that arena, and it extended for what seemed like a kilometre-plus.

I think that in the context of COVID-19, we must act and we must move to make sure that there's greater access, so that those elderly seniors and others, with the new pandemic reality that we're in, have increased access. So extending that from five to 10 days is so critical. Not only that, if you look to elections that are taking place and taking lessons learned from our peers across Canada today, we know that advance polls have been heavily subscribed to, meaning that people were turning up in the hundreds, in their respective polls, to advance polls to get out and vote. So by extending that, we're ensuring physical distancing; we're ensuring greater access. We know that many now are choosing to exercise their democratic right in advance polls, so by extending that we're really ensuring that we increase accessibility and that we only extend the democratic process and give people that ability to cast their ballots, to have their say.

When I think, as I said, to rural ridings like mine in Northumberland–Peterborough South, by extending

advance polls and by offering more locations over a greater number of days, it means that the folks on the north shores of Rice Lake, people living outside of Trent Hills, people in the upper corner of Asphodel–Norwood, who would have to drive great distances, will have access to casting their ballot that much easier. I know for moms and dads who are very busy, for seniors keeping up with their busy schedules as well, being able to access the ballot box and being able to cast your ballot in a much easier manner only incentivizes getting people out to vote. When it's easier, when you don't have to get in your car and drive 20, 30 or 40 minutes to the ballot box—if you can do it on your way home, on your way from picking up your kids at school etc., it just makes the democratic process that much closer to the fingertips of everyday Ontarians. I think that's so important, especially in the COVID reality.

Another measure I think is critical is really looking at third-party advertising and spending. We know that the scale we've seen in 2018—over \$5 million spent. Madam Speaker, I would suggest that there are so many out there, many even outside the borders of this province, who don't trust Ontarians and the everyday voter to cast their ballot, so they have to pour in millions to try to influence that decision. They don't want that natural relationship between a party and the people who they seek to have the honour to represent.

I think to the 13 or so debates I attended. I think to the Third and Fourth Line roads that I ran down, running down long driveways to try to have a conversation with a farmer, to convince them about the reasons that I was running and what I was going to do for them, and to listen to what they wanted me to do for them if given the opportunity to serve them. I can't compete with the \$5 million in advertising poured in, but it's those relationships, those important conversations. It's finding compromise with someone at the door who might never have intended to vote for you. That's what our democracy is all about.

I think we need only look to examples south of the border to see what happens when third-party advertising and spending that has no bounds—corporations, numbered corporations, entities that are faceless—influence this electoral process, so I firmly support these measures to really get back to basics, to get back to that relationship between the voter and between the people who they seek to represent.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to move a motion without notice respecting notice for private members' public business.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to move a motion. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that notice for ballot item number 62, standing in the name of Mr. Babikian; ballot item number 64, standing in the name of Mr. Glover; ballot item number 65, standing in the name of Mr. West; ballot item number 66, standing in the name of Mrs. Stevens; ballot item number 67, standing in the name of Mr. Cho, Willowdale; ballot item number 68, standing in the name of Miss Taylor; and ballot item number 69, standing in the name of Ms. Fee, be waived.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Mr. Calandra has moved that notice for ballot item number 62—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Oh, thank you. It's a good day.

Is it agreed? Agreed. Okay.

Motion agreed to.

PROTECTING ONTARIO ELECTIONS ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA PROTECTION DES ÉLECTIONS EN ONTARIO

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Now, questions and comments.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I pose a question to the member from Durham. The member knows I do hold her in high esteem in this House and value her contributions.

Speaker, the member started off her comments by saying that the changes proposed in Bill 254 will ensure that individuals remain at the centre of the electoral process. My question is, what individuals? By increasing the spending limit to \$3,300 on a political donation, the individuals will have to be rich. Perhaps they'll be lobbyists, bankers, home builders, rental providers, insurance brokers.

Who can afford to spend \$3,300 to make a political donation to the party? That's my question.

1550

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Response? The member from Northumberland–Peterborough South.

Mr. David Piccini: I thank the member for that important question.

Ontario is the only province where we measure third-party-influenced advertising in the millions rather than in the thousands. I think the answer to your question is, when we stack that up in the millions versus individuals who choose to make a donation—again, those individual contribution limits, we know, put Ontario, Canada's largest province, only in the middle of the pack.

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

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciated the remarks from my two colleagues and their comments on this important piece of legislation.

Obviously, all of us in the chamber desperately hope that by the time we reach the next election, we will be

through the worst of this pandemic, but of course, we just don't know. So I think it's incumbent upon us, as a government, to take measures to make sure that elections can be held in a responsible way, given uncertain circumstances.

I'm wondering if one of my two colleagues might be able to provide some commentary on some of the measures that this bill introduces to make sure that we can be flexible and adaptable in how we run elections, to make sure that they're accountable for the people of Ontario.

Mr. David Piccini: I thank the member for Ottawa West–Nepean for that question—one who is no stranger to knocking on many doors, I know.

It's important, as he said, to be flexible and nimble. When you look to elections, as we've seen in Canada, elections in Newfoundland and other provinces, where there have been significant challenges for many, many who are scared to go to the ballot box—which, traditionally, hundreds descend upon. By extending advance poll days, by giving more flexibility for Ontarians to go to that ballot box, we're giving flexibility to our democratic system, flexibility in response to the pandemic. It's only better for our democratic process.

I would just add, some of the powers being given to the Chief Electoral Officer, again, for minor violations, rather than clogging up the ministry months later—we give the electoral officer the ability to be flexible and to act upon them in a—

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: My question goes to either one of them, whoever wants to answer. It's the same question I asked the member from Guelph.

The Girl Guides group I met with yesterday talked a lot about different issues that they feel very passionate about, issues that are important and urgent, like addressing air pollution, the use of plastics, safer schools, and promoting arts, tourism and culture in this province.

What is your message to these girls in terms of why this bill on election financing takes precedence over all of the urgent issues that we could be discussing and debating today?

Mr. David Piccini: I appreciate the member posing that question. The answer isn't an either/or. The answer is: This government is addressing all of that.

I'll speak first to safer schools. You spoke about safer schools. This government was the first to lead in asymptomatic testing. This government was the first to roll out public nurses in our schools. This government has continued on asymptomatic testing to show that our schools are a safe place to learn. We've ensured that over 63,000 units were provided to the most vulnerable, to ensure that they can learn online and that those supports were in their hands.

With respect to the arts, we saw the historic announcement yesterday to support the arts organizations. I think, in my community, of Critical Mass, doing great work, and Capitol Theatre, which have received funding from this government to support them through the pandemic.

Finally, microplastics: I'm really glad she raises that. I'd love for her to come out, in a spirit of bipartisanship, to Cobourg, where we can talk to Pollution Probe executives, supported by this government, who are working in partnership with U of T to clean up microplastics in the Great Lakes, to study their source—

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: To the two members there: We all come from rural areas, and certainly I do, too. I have used electronic voting equipment, both when I was a councillor in North Perth and during my candidate election. We used electronic voting machines.

One of the proposed amendments in the Protecting Ontario Elections Act comes from the recommendation of the Chief Electoral Officer to strike an advisory committee on the use of voting equipment for provincial elections.

Can one of the members please expand more on this change and what this means for municipal elections in Ontario?

Mr. David Piccini: I thank the member for that great question. I know, having served, and with extensive knowledge of the municipality—I just would give a twofold answer there: First, I think it's important that we're allowing the electronic nominations in the submission there. That's a critical piece that we know municipalities have asked for. Secondly, I know the Chief Electoral Officer already has broad powers to issue direction requiring the use of vote-counting equipment in provincial elections, and we've proposed to create that advisory committee, as the member mentioned.

This advisory committee to establish guidelines on voting equipment is based on best practices in provincial elections. The guidelines would inform all of Ontario's general elections. I think that it's important that by having that committee, it instills confidence. We know that Elections Ontario is a non-partisan office of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It's important that as we utilize these tools, we have that ability to robustly assess them.

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Ontario right now, as of today, is seventh in Canada with respect to per capita vaccinations. If you add in the territories, that brings us to 10th in Canada for per capita vaccinations.

We have seen small businesses devastated by this pandemic. We have seen our health care system struggle to keep up with the increase of cases.

Why, at a time like this, is the Conservative government prioritizing increasing the limit of donations instead of prioritizing everyday Ontarians?

Mr. David Piccini: I'm glad the member brought that up. We lead the nation in terms of second doses administered, and we lead the nation in terms of vaccines administered. We're going to continue to work hard to protect Ontarians.

As I mentioned to the member's colleagues, I can go on for days on the number of measures we're doing to support various sectors of this economy. I'd be keen to know why

the member didn't ask anything relative to this specific bill on ensuring accessible, equitable access to the ballot box. Is it perhaps because that member supports American-style third-party action groups, and maybe he'd rather have those groups influencing his election?

On this side of the House, we want to make sure it's Ontarians who have their say in the electoral process.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We don't have time for another back and forth.

Further debate?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It is always an honour and a pleasure to rise, representing the people of Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

I need to start with an apology to the people of my riding, because I know that this is not what you expect me to be discussing today. I receive your emails. We talk on the phone. I know what's important to you in the riding right now. I know that you're worried about your seniors, your loved ones who are in long-term care, your folks who aren't getting vaccines, the confusing rollout of the vaccines. I know that you're worried about your kids in school, worried about their safety. I know that you are front-line workers who don't have paid sick days. I know that you are valiantly trying to keep the doors of your small businesses open with no support from this government.

They are out of touch with what is important to everyday Ontarians, and this bill that they have forced upon us in this House is a perfect example of how out of touch they are. Why are we, in the middle of a pandemic—it's March 4, 2021. We are in the middle of a pandemic, and this government's priority is to talk about elections. If that's not bad enough, this bill is all about getting big money back into elections, and it's all about silencing their critics. They have many critics because of the multiplying failures that they are facing when it comes to their COVID-19 response.

1600

This bill is entitled “protecting Ontario elections.” I don't know if the PC operatives back there work really hard to come up with tongue-in-cheek names for these bills. I can imagine there are peals of laughter when they've spent all this time to come up with a bill entitled “protecting Ontario elections” and it does exactly the opposite.

We had a government that put forward a bill called “protecting students,” and what did it do? It cut OSAP and made it even more difficult for low-income students to access post-secondary education. So just the name of the bill is insulting.

I would like to say that if the government really respected the people of Ontario, you wouldn't try to name bills that are the precise opposite of what you're trying to do. People see through this.

A government that stands in their place and says that they're here to protect Ontario's elections—can we remember that this is a government that scrapped ranked ballots? Constitutional experts around the world said that

ranked ballots will in fact improve the outcome of elections—fairer elections. But without any consultation whatsoever, this government scrapped ranked ballots.

Do we remember that, in the middle of a municipal election, this government and Premier Ford decided to meddle in the municipal election of the city of Toronto? I was a new MPP at the time, and I was horrified to see the galleries filled with people who were here to say you should not be meddling in democratic elections that are already under way. It was horrifying. I saw seniors—a senior man and an elderly senior woman, who was actually a defender of elections—arrested and taken away in handcuffs. That was this government's doing. They were the actual defenders of democratic elections, not this government.

So it's really, really absurd to hear from a government purporting to be protecting elections. You have proven to be a government that constantly puts your thumb on the scale to tip elections in your favour, to change the rules to benefit this government. How in heaven's name is that protecting Ontario's elections? It's not.

Again, it is completely asinine for this government to stand forward and say that they are protecting—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock. I'm going to interrupt the member.

There have been a couple of things in the last moment or two that have made me pause. I'm going to invite the member to ensure that her language is parliamentary. Specifically, we can never guess or avow motive, so just walk that line carefully. Thank you.

I return to the member.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you, Madam Speaker. That is a perfectly good word. It's in the Oxford dictionary, and so I stand by that word being completely parliamentary, but I'll take your caution.

If there's any doubt, let's be clear about what this bill is about: It's about big money coming back into Ontario's elections. This bill is not about protecting elections. It's an obvious move not only to ensure that not-everyday Ontarians have an ability to participate in elections with their contributions, but it's certainly an ability to make sure that there are well-heeled donors—and in addition, there are measures in this bill that silence critics of this government.

If we haven't already made this clear, the central piece of this bill is increases to individual contributions that nobody asked for. Let's be perfectly clear that they've doubled an individual contribution, from \$1,650 to \$3,300. There's an additional provision that an individual can donate to the party, to the riding and the candidate. So an individual can donate up to \$9,900 to a political party.

The question has been asked here over and over again: Who can afford this? Who in this province could afford that kind of money in the middle of a pandemic or at any time? I'll tell you who cannot: It's not our front-line workers. It's not our PSWs who work tirelessly for minimum wage. It's not health care workers who haven't even benefited from the pandemic bump-up pay, who have been excluded from that. These are not people who could afford this kind of big-ticket item; absolutely not. So who

is this bill designed to appease? That's a question this government needs to answer.

It's unbelievable that, in fact, in this there's a provision that there will be an advance on the per-vote subsidy. In this bill, a subsidy that should have been paid in the first quarter of 2023 will actually be paid in 2022, in the year of the election. It's an advance. Essentially, this government is taking a loan from the taxpayers of the province of Ontario. It's a payday loan, really, is what it is—"I'll take this loan now, and I'll pay it at a later date."

What I want to say about payday loans is that I tabled a bill, the Payday Loans Accountability Act, because right now, during a pandemic, people are struggling financially and they're losing their jobs. People were relying on CERB.

Payday institutions, in fact, made a provision that people could borrow against their CERB payments. People who already were struggling were now allowed to borrow against this emergency measure to keep their family housed and fed. I wrote to the Premier about this to say: Is this okay with the government? Is it okay with the government that people are so financially strapped in the province of Ontario that when they get their CERB payments, which is a taxpayer support, that a for-profit company like a payday lender can use that, can leverage and profit off that? But the government took no action on that.

So my bill stands. It provides all kinds of protections for people who are forced to use payday loans. If the government wanted to show what their priorities were really all about, they might want to pass that, but there's no action on that file. But we can see that lots and lots of effort went into this bill.

The private member's bill that I just talked about took months to prepare. We do consultations with stakeholders. We do research with the legislative library. We make sure, with legislative counsel, that it's in proper order. There is a lot of work that goes into that—and that is so with this bill.

This government spent a lot of time, a lot of resources and a lot of effort to get this bill before us. But one thing they didn't do is put any effort into their vaccine rollout. They didn't put any effort to make sure that there was an iron ring around long-term care. But this was their priority.

We know this government has a majority, and we know that they determine the agenda of the House. But as the great Stan Lee said, "With great power comes great responsibility." I'm pretty sure that we would all be disappointed to know that this is what this government considers their responsibility at this time.

For heaven's sake, 4,000 seniors have died in long-term care, and people are still dying.

Seniors in my riding are not getting the vaccines. They're confused. They are told to go online. How is a 96-year-old woman in my riding to go online? Explain that to them.

This is the priority of this government. As we've heard, on a per capita basis the province of Ontario is seventh in vaccines—seventh. You're bringing up the rear. But this

is a priority. This is what we are spending time here debating today.

I'm pretty sure—the government probably knows because they spent so much time researching this—the province of Ontario has to be the only Legislature in Canada that is being forced to debate this, that is facing these changes being rammed through the Legislature, when everybody else is struggling to keep themselves, their friends and family safe. But this is the priority of this government.

As the member from Essex described it, he called this a tawdry bill, and I couldn't agree more.

1610

We, on this side of the House, have proposed very reasonable, helpful motions. We proposed paid sick days so people can stay home when they're sick. We proposed a Saving Main Street plan to help our struggling main street businesses. But that is not at all what we're looking at today to deal with.

I have to quote the MPP from Cambridge who said that this government is doing a rubbish job on their vaccine rollout. It's probably one of the few things I agree with that she said, but honestly, no one is giving you a gold star on your response to COVID-19 and nobody expects that we should be standing here, talking about increasing the amount that people can contribute in an election.

I don't know. That's not what I'm hearing in my riding. What are the Conservative members hearing in their ridings? When your phone rings or when you receive emails, is the first thing people say, "Hey, I've been really concerned. I'm really concerned about American-style politics. It's the first thing on my mind. I wake up in the morning and I go, 'Oh, I'm really, really worried about American-style politics.'" No, they don't talk about that.

Do you know what they talk about? They talk about the fact that they're struggling to put food on the table. They're worried about all of the things that this House should be occupied with instead of this.

In my riding, as in probably all of the ridings across the province of Ontario, not-for-profit service agencies are struggling to fill in the gap that this government has left in terms of supporting people in their communities. It's a shame to say, but in the province of Ontario we still have kids going to school hungry. Childhood hunger is a problem. There's something that we should be addressing in this Legislature. But this is a government where the first thing you did was you cut the basic income program, you cut proposed increases to the minimum wage—but we still have childhood hunger. In Hamilton, there is a group called Food4Kids, supported by the Hamilton Professional Firefighters Association Local 288. They have #eatAbeet campaign. Essentially, they're trying to encourage people to donate so that they can feed kids, so that kids don't have to go to school hungry. Is that not a problem in any of your ridings, childhood hunger? Is that something you should be spending your time addressing?

We proposed the Save Main Street plan early on to provide immediate, quick support to small businesses. It was actually to provide them the liquidity, the kind of

supports they needed from the get-go. The government turned it down and dragged their heels while businesses in the province of Ontario, businesses in my riding in Dundas, in Ancaster, on the West Mountain closed their doors. Now we have groups like the Rotary Club of Dundas and other groups that have come up with innovative ways to support local businesses in the absence of true support from this government.

The Rotary Club of Dundas Valley Sunrise has something called Dundas Dine to Donate, and for each meal that people order from a local restaurant, they'll make a \$10 donation to a Dundas foodbank. There's something the government could occupy itself with: understanding how we can fill the shelves in our food banks.

I know that Hamilton Jewish Family Services in my riding fundraise constantly to keep the shelves full. It's a lot of work, it's a lot of effort, and those are not the people who are thinking about, "How can I donate \$3,300 to a political party?" In fact, if they had that kind of money, they might consider donating it to the Ancaster Community Food Drive. The Ancaster Community Food Drive that's happening right now in my riding is struggling again to fill the shelves of all the agencies they serve. They serve Ancaster Community Services, Good Shepherd Centres, Hamilton Food Share, Mission Services of Hamilton, Neighbour to Neighbour Centre, St. Matthew's House, the Salvation Army and Wesley Urban Ministries.

These are the agencies that are on the front line, and I can guarantee you that the people who use these food bank services or perhaps even people who work there are not prepared to or cannot afford \$3,300. But a \$1 contribution equals one healthy meal, so one contribution at the max is the equivalent of 3,300 meals for people who are going hungry in our ridings.

I'd just like to say that the Ancaster Community Food Drive will be celebrating their 30th anniversary next year. In fact, in all the time they've been doing this, they've raised almost two million pounds of food. There's something we should be talking about, not elections in the middle of a pandemic.

So I'd like to close, to say that I am stunned that this is what I'm standing here talking about. I've seen this government bring forward bills that cause all kinds of suffering and pain in this province. I've seen the government bring forward tone-deaf bills. I've seen them bring forward bills that are quite obviously attempts to make sure that they are looking after the people that they think they represent, not average Ontarians.

But this bill is beyond cynical. It's unbelievable. It's unbelievable. Again, in the middle of a pandemic, when people are dying, when there's no vaccine rollout, when it's a confusing mess out there for people—people are still dying in long-term care. In the middle of a pandemic, we are talking about elections and making sure that we get big money back into our elections and making sure that there are provisions to silence this government's critics. Believe me, there are a lot of critics, rightfully so.

There are health care leaders that speak up all the time about this government's failure when it comes to their

response to COVID. We see these mounting failures and we hear these voices. We see the results from the long-term-care commission, that this government wouldn't even extend the time for them to do their work. The testimony there is, frankly, shocking. That's what we should be focusing on, that testimony, to make changes in our long-term-care homes so this doesn't happen again, not an election that's a year and a half away. It really is beyond ridiculous—I was going to use that other word, but I'll just stick with "ridiculous."

We saw the Liberals. We lived through that. I was on the doorstep, knocking, on the campaign, and people were completely outraged by the gas plant scandals and all the gold-plated fundraisers that the Liberals were hosting. And as I hear from the member from Tecumseh, the members of this party were also railing against that. But here they are: the irony, the absolutely irony that this is what they're putting forward when they railed against it.

This is entirely what it appears to be. It is a massive cash grab. Not only is it a cash grab, not only is it completely, completely tone deaf, it's so insensitive to people who are struggling right now. We heard the member from Flamborough—Glanbrook say, "The world goes on," like, "too bad, so sorry." It's those kinds of comments and this kind of action that show this government to be cruel and insensitive. I would like to hope that people in the province of Ontario and in ridings across Ontario have questions to ask of their MPPs: "Is this a priority? Because if you think this is a priority, you're not listening to me."

And so, Madam Speaker, I'll leave it at that. But I do hope that this government, while they're busy trying to make sure that insiders and well-heeled donors are looked after, look after the people of the province of Ontario as well.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for her speech and referring to the actual bill. I just wonder if the member supports some of the changes made in the bill that were recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer, including in our COVID environment. Because of COVID, the Chief Electoral Officer's report was asking for five more flexible polling days before the next election, asking for a committee to deal with technology to make elections more accessible, and asking for monetary penalties so that rules with elections can be enforced. So I just wonder if the member supports those requests from the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario required for the next election.

1620

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much for the question. While there are good suggestions in this bill, this entire bill speaks to the complete tone deafness of this government. This is what you've spent your time doing? These are the commissions that you've listened to? Are you not listening to the long-term care commission? That's where you should be spending your time. That's what I would support. I would support a bill being brought forward that addresses the real concerns of the people of the province of Ontario, which is that they're struggling

with their small businesses, they're struggling with their finances and they're worried about the health and safety of their friends and their loved ones. That's what I would like to see before us.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'd like to thank the member from Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas for her very thoughtful comments. I really appreciated her analysis.

The member mentioned that this is a cynical piece of legislation. I could not agree more. When I was thinking a bit about some of those gold-plated events, those fundraisers that the previous Liberal government got in some hot water over and then brought in changes eventually because Conservatives and New Democrats opposed that, I wondered if these are the same kind of donors: the construction companies, the developers that make a lot of money off of government contracts, the pharmaceutical industry that wants their drugs listed.

I wonder if you would care to comment on who this legislation is really intended for.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: There's the \$3,300 question right there. We're seeing people asking these questions. We see a government that is issuing MZOs to developers that as a matter of fact have contributed to this party. We're seeing a government that's extending the land use planning to ensure, when lands are rezoned, that developers and land speculators make big, big bucks.

The question about who this bill is written for is a question that this government needs to answer.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you to the member from Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas. The member has brought up some interesting points here. I wonder if the member would remember back—when the opposition goes back in time about what this party used to do and what they agreed with and what didn't agree with. I know some of the members were here. I see one who was here back in 2012 when they got rid of 20,000 to 30,000 people in the horse racing industry. I wonder if they remember that. They sit there and claim they're here for small business—bingo, they got rid of the horse racing industry in one vote because they sat on their hands over here and didn't get up to vote to defeat that budget. Don't sit there and say that—

Interjection.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: The Chief Electoral Officer issued a special report on election administration in the COVID-19 pandemic in November 2020. He highlighted the impacts that COVID-19 has and will have on elections across Canada and highlighted the importance—

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I want to thank the member for proving my point that this government is completely out

of touch with what's important to the people of the province of Ontario. Really, you're talking about gambling and horse racing? You're talking about something that happened 15 years ago and that is not top of mind for the people of the province of Ontario.

If this government is really concerned about what's important to the people of Ontario, take this bill away and come forward with a bill that provides paid sick days for all the people of the province of Ontario, that makes sure that there's a safe return to school, that there are classes capped at 15 and that we have proper testing in schools. That would be something that would show that you're not completely out of touch.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: I listened very carefully to the speech that you gave about the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, and what really struck home for me was that this is not the first time the Ontario government, the Ford government, has chosen to change the rules of the game, change the rules of the election game in order to benefit their interests at the detriment of other people's interests.

Could you give us a summary of some of the detrimental changes to election rules that you've seen this government engage in in this bill, and other times and in other municipalities?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you very much for the question. I said it in my speech, and I think there has been so much that has happened with this government that has been so controversial and so damaging to the province of Ontario that I think we forget that this government just decided, in the middle of a democratic election in the city of Toronto, to change the rules. Again, the gallery was full and Queen's Park was full. People were banging on the walls; I remember people banging on the walls. Those are the true defenders of democracy, not this government. And so I would say to you that it is completely—you won't let me use this perfect word, but it is completely asinine that this government is pretending to protect elections when they've done nothing but the opposite.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock. I had mentioned earlier that I was asking the member to [*inaudible*] language, and that is specifically the word that I had said before, so I'm going to ask not to be ignored. Thank you.

Resume the clock. Question?

Mr. David Piccini: I thank the member for her speech. Four hours of direct care in long-term care, making us a leader in Canada; a \$56-million micro-credential strategy; launching education pathways to support health care workers; increasing small and medium-sized hospital funding; first province to launch asymptomatic testing in our schools; accelerated builds for long-term care, with 30,000 beds; launching community paramedicine; and introducing Ontario health teams: What do all of those have in common? They were introduced through different pieces of legislation.

So my question to that member is, why is she so against increasing accessibility and advance polling, and why is

she so against preventing American-style third-party groups from infiltrating our elections?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I find it disturbing that this government seems to be bringing forward this QAnon conspiracy stuff when it comes to talking about American-style elections, because that's not what's important here. I also wonder why the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South is so concerned with this when you have to have issues of childhood hunger in your riding. I know that the Northumberland Fare Food Bank serves 600 households a month. Those are 600 households that want to you take care of them, not worry about America and not worry about your well-heeled donors.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We have time for a quick back-and-forth.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: One such third-party advertiser called Ontario Proud received about \$150,000 just from three developers in Ontario prior to the last election, and went on to do lots of positive advertising for this government. Following that, this government launched one of the most pro-developer agendas we've ever seen in the province of Ontario. Does that smell fishy to you?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Well, if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck—but what I want to say is that this is a government that is showing all its cards when it shows that they are pro-development at all costs, even if the cost of development is the greenbelt; even if the cost of development is our natural heritage, like the Oak Ridges moraine; even if the cost is that we are going to pave over Duffins Creek, a wetland; even if we're going to put Highway 413, which nobody wants, through sensitive lands; even if it means the loss of agricultural lands, which we're losing at the rate of 175 acres a day. It is clear that this government's pro-development bent, if you will, started in 2018, and now this gift to pro developers just continues.

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

Ms. Jill Andrew: I'm glad to stand on behalf of our community members in St. Paul's to add my name to the debate on the government's Protecting Ontario Elections Act. This is the cash money, power-grab act, in my opinion, because the bill is all about money.

1630

This bill allows for an increase of personal donations, donations to the constituency associations—of a limit increase of \$3,300, and that limit increases by \$25 every year after that. It increases the amount a candidate can donate to themselves, from \$4,000 to \$10,000. It increases the amount a leadership candidate can donate to themselves to \$50,000, doubling the current \$25,000.

These are figures that are so beyond reachable for many of our constituents in St. Paul's, who are gathering on crowded buses and crowded streetcars and busy trains on mornings, to get to their essential worker jobs that keep all of us standing and keep the lights on everywhere and keep our communities functioning. They can't afford to participate in this kind of pay-to-play access politics. They cannot afford to have the ear of this government. They're not developers, they're not CEOs—some are, and even

those have said to me, “Jill, why is this the topic of the day? I may be wealthy, but I see the benefit in having paid sick days. It will keep us all safer.”

This bill, to me, really smells of a lot of fear, quite frankly, and fear from this government. The reality is, they know that they have failed Ontarians. They know that they have failed our front-line health care workers.

I will never forget health care workers here at Queen’s Park, health care workers I’ve spoken to over Zoom, crying because they did not have access to PPE, because this government did not make that accessible. These are the folks we should be fighting for today—our front-line health care workers, our teachers, our educators, our education workers, our custodians who have been literally placing their lives on the line, each and every day, trying to do the best for our students, whether virtually or in person, in buildings that are literally falling apart because this government will not get off the dime and invest in real things that matter to us in St. Paul’s, or across Ontario.

This bill does not speak to the realities of those in my riding who have faced evictions during this pandemic. It does not speak to those in my riding who thought for a moment that the Conservative government gave a rat’s tush.

Interjections.

Ms. Jill Andrew: I’m trying to be as polite as possible here; I really am. But I’m also trying to share with the government how upset the folks are here in St. Paul’s. When your toilet doesn’t work—

Hon. Paul Calandra: Pathetic.

Ms. Jill Andrew: You’re right: The government is pretty pathetic. When your toilet doesn’t work—

Interjections.

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

All members are not helping to contribute to the level of debate by the crosstalk or the name-calling. I’m not sure who it was in that back corner with the name-calling.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): No, I am capable of identifying the government House leader’s voice, but in this case it was someone else.

I’m going to invite everyone to stop. Stop. The House will come to order. The member from Toronto-St. Paul’s has the floor. The crosstalk will stop. And we are going to raise the level of debate so that all language in this House is parliamentary, on both sides.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Oh, the government can clap, but the government is just as guilty. We are all going to raise the level for the rest of today. Thank you.

Sorry for the interruption. I return to the member.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

As I was saying, with regard to housing and the crisis we have in our province and the challenges that our folks in St. Paul’s have certainly experienced during this pandemic, it is irrational. It makes no sense. It is demonstrative of a government that doesn’t have their

eyes on the ball when we have tenants who are suffering, who don’t know how they’re going to make next month’s rent. And yet, rather than addressing those kinds of issues, we have a government that is more concerned with padding their own political campaign pockets, quite frankly, and giving gifts to developers, and not listening to health professionals who are demanding that we have asymptomatic testing in schools, who are demanding that we get vaccines in the arms of the most vulnerable as fast as possible. This just doesn’t seem to be a priority right now, during COVID-19.

Earlier, I was listening to the debate when a member said, “Oh, this is going to help us with social distancing.” Social distancing is very important. But I strongly believe that social distancing could be better enforced by properly funding our municipalities, so they can get us public transit that’s safe and healthy during a pandemic. Social distancing can be better enforced by having a cap on classrooms, so our kids and education workers and teachers aren’t like sardines in classrooms during a pandemic. Social distancing can be better enforced if our shelters weren’t bursting at the seams and folks who are in perpetual cycles of homelessness, of income precarity—these aren’t the people who can contribute \$3,300 to any campaign: not mine; not anyone’s in this chamber.

We need to focus on those who are most vulnerable. We need to focus on the mental health of our constituents, of our community members, of people who have completely lost their way of living, their income during this time.

I don’t know many grassroots artists, I don’t know many of our community artists working outside of the barns or at the Nia Centre, who can afford \$3,300 donations to any party.

I’m just going to read some information here. Before COVID-19, the median income of an Ontario artist was \$23,500, which is below the median income for Canadian artists of \$24,600 and far below the median income of all Ontario workers of \$43,600. Indigenous, racialized and women artists have lower median incomes than their non-racialized, non-Indigenous and male counterparts. For example, the median income of Indigenous artists in Canada is \$16,600, while non-Indigenous, non-racialized male artists have a median income of \$27,100.

If we’re focusing on what really matters, we need to be focusing on the fact that people are having a hard time. Whether it’s our food banks that are exploding, whether it’s our community centres, our churches—I think about the Beeton Cupboard at St. Michael, where the line wraps around because people have so much need. This is not what they need right now. We need not just a rent freeze, but we need supports that extend beyond 2021. We need an eviction ban. We need direct supports in the hands of artists.

The government made an announcement—the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries—about money going towards arts institutions. We welcome any funding towards arts institutions, but right now, direct artists are starving and are negotiating where to live. This bill doesn’t offer any answers to those artists.

Some of the government members have said that advance poll days are going from five to 10, if the bill passes, but not all advance poll stations have to even have the same hours or even be open for all those 10 days. So it's not a guarantee, necessarily, that every single community member in every single riding is going to experience the "benefit" of this addition.

1640

Of course, we want people to be able to vote. We want people to have more access to voting. We want people's community voices to actually be heard in the voting process—not having a government aggressively slash city council in Toronto by half, for instance; not having a government that clearly doesn't agree with proportional representation or doesn't agree with ranked ballots and doesn't agree with anything that actually supports emphasizing the voices of our community members.

I want to read a quote from Brenda, an artist, to bring back in the artists' voices, because artists' voices have been missing, I think, throughout the pandemic, and they really are some of the folks who are experiencing the most pay inequity:

"How I get compensated, or not, for my work is mostly through paid gigs, grants and royalties, none of which pay enough. Music sales are mostly a thing of the past, so as an artist, I'm basically spending many thousands of dollars on creating music just so I can give it away for free while corporations like Spotify and Apple profit from my work. I was already being undervalued and underpaid, and now I'm increasingly anxious about what I will be paid for—in any—in-person gigs as we ease out of the pandemic in the next several months or years."

Again, I ask for this government to reflect on the actual needs of the community at this time. Reflect on what the community has asked for. They say that they're a government for the people. They're not a government for the majority of the 14 million-plus folks who are here in Ontario, because the majority of those folks aren't making six figures or more. The majority of those folks aren't CEOs. The majority of Ontarians aren't registered lobbyists, having the ear of the government. The majority of Ontarians aren't developers. The majority of Ontarians are not benefiting from ministerial zoning orders that allow for buildings to crop up like weeds, with little to no affordable housing; with no consideration for environmental concerns, density, population, lack of green space; with no community centres or libraries; with crumbling schools unable to fit the growing community.

I really think that we should come back to basics, and coming back to basics is focusing on people first—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): 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 look to the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think the debate should continue.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. I return to the member.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you very much. That means that I get to share Jana's words too—wonderful. While I'm pulling them up, I will continue to speak on the inappropriate nature of this bill at this time.

We have PSWs who never saw their pandemic pay. We have front-line health workers who have been run off their feet, and we've seen the consequences of this. This bill speaks nothing to those issues. What it does do is, it silences the third parties. It silences people who have a bone to pick with this government. It silences the health advocates. It silences the plethora of doctors and experts, parents and small business owners who have been screaming at the top of their lungs, "Let's get paid sick days on the record so we can protect people."

Jana is a fantastic member of our community. She is an ODSP/OW community advocate. We talk all the time. I want to read something she wrote on body image, and I'm going to express why she said I should include it in today's debate—because she worries about how people living with disabilities are portrayed and the way in which they can never be "disabled enough," if I use Jana's words.

"Invisible disabilities are extremely hard to live with. Everyone thinks you're fine if there are no visual cues. Because of how I look, even having a service dog is not always enough and people often assume that I am training. My husband's lawyer constantly told him that injustices would not be sympathetic because he looked good; he didn't look disabled enough.

"Many insurance programs have surveillance. We are 'surveilled.' If we have a good day, it's not good for us. This is another example of how exclusive body image expectations work against people with disabilities. Putting people through assessments strictly run through closed-off insurance programs run by bureaucrats to assess how disabled someone is based on outdated ideas is mentally damaging.

"We need to re-evaluate how we look at people of all abilities. We need to re-evaluate what our priorities are. We need to raise the amount of money that people living with disabilities here in Ontario, Jill, have access to. That should be the priority."

I think she said it best: "That should be the priority"—not working on bills, spending money and time and resources to put forth legislation that does not speak to the realities of what we're dealing with right now.

The election is supposed to happen in 2022. As I said yesterday, or the day before—I don't remember; the days sort of all bleed together because there's such a crisis going on in our communities with this pandemic. And rather than focusing on vaccines, we're here talking about campaign donations. Tomorrow is not promised, let alone 2022. Isn't the best idea to focus on the emergency at hand now, to save our small businesses, to put direct funding into the hands of our small business owners across St. Paul's, in Little Jamaica, across our ridings of this province of Ontario? Isn't the important thing for us to ensure is that every single person has a home they can call

their own—a place where they can be safe, whether it's owned, whether it's rented; a place where they don't have to fear being evicted during a pandemic; a place where they can trust that a rent freeze isn't going to somehow not be a rent freeze because the government has still allowed AGIs? AGIs are still allowed. We know there are fraudulent landlords who can use an AGI to get back some of that rent revenue.

These are the kinds of things that our government should be protecting the most vulnerable folks in our province from, not wasting time padding their war chest. As I said earlier, I really do think that this bill—not only is it a power grab and a cash grab and a pay-to-play—it really is about cash for access. I mean, at the end of the day, if you can donate thousands of dollars, I'm sure you can have that one-on-one meeting. I'm sure you'll get that meeting a lot faster than Jana will, or Brenda will, or any of the other folks in our riding who can't get responses when they're calling out for paid sick days or when they're calling out for more affordable housing.

1650

I really do feel that this bill is about a government that is scared, a government that is afraid and a government that realizes that Ontario is not happy with how they've handled the province since becoming government, and most certainly the detrimental decades that they've pushed back some Ontarians, especially women, during this pandemic with their lacklustre, failed response.

I think I'll end it at that. I'll thank the folks in St. Paul's who said, "Jill, what the heck is this bill about? Why aren't we talking about paid sick days?" They've got their priorities in order—

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

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for their speech. The member mentioned that—I think she said that third parties would be silenced by this legislation. In the past election, the 2018 election, third parties spent over \$5 million. This legislation is going to allow each individual third party to spend \$600,000 in the year leading up to an election and over \$100,000 in an election. How is that silencing a third party?

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you for the question. Something tells me that there are going to be a whole lot of third parties who are going to be real upset about the crash that has been our long-term-care system during the pandemic, the erosion of education, of the care that our workers should have that they haven't gotten from this government. There will be a lot of third-party health advocates, people who are fighting for our environment who will want to tell the world through advertising how bad this government has been. And that's why their wings have been clipped.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Under the last Liberal government, we all heard about how ministers were pressured to raise up to \$500,000 from stakeholders within their portfolios for funds. A current minister, who was a critic

at the time, said that he had reached out to these people giving money and couldn't raise the money from them.

It's interesting that there is a particular developer with a net worth of almost \$4 billion that used to give all their money to the Liberals but, since the change in government, has given about \$15,000 that we know of in the last two years alone. Again, my question is: Does that smell fishy?

Ms. Jill Andrew: Holy Toledo. Let's open all the windows, for goodness' sake. Let's open all the windows.

Again, what I said: This is cash for access. It really, really is. This bill is about propping up those who have the ear of the government and encouraging them to keep wanting the ear of the government. This bill has nothing to do with the issues that are at hand in our ridings, and the government should be ashamed of that.

I tell the Speaker this, no word of a lie: Conservative community members are saying, "Jill, what's going on at Queen's Park? What's going on? I'm embarrassed. He's not my Premier." That's what they're telling me—Conservative members.

This bill, the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, is an act about money and it's an act about the government's fears, quite frankly.

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

Ms. Lindsey Park: What I understood—I listened carefully to the member opposite's speech—was that she was wondering why this bill at this time. Well, very clearly, we have stated over and over again, there was a report done by the Chief Electoral Officer with the aim—this is November 2020. Again, he says right in it: "It is critical that Elections Ontario be ready to deliver an election that protects both the integrity of the vote, and the health and safety of voters and our staff." I want to know: Does the member opposite support those efforts?

Ms. Jill Andrew: There was a report done by the FAO that shows that we are, what, near the bottom—we're the seventh province, for goodness' sakes—in terms of vaccinations.

Interjection.

Ms. Jill Andrew: That is the answer to the question. The answer to the question is, what does this bill have to do with getting vaccines into the arms of those who are vulnerable? What does this bill have to do with protecting our essential workers, with protecting our front-line health care workers? What does this bill have to do with ensuring that the government doesn't railroad over our environment under the guise of a pandemic?

We're not idiots, and Ontarians are not idiots, either. They see right through you.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Toronto—St. Paul's, who so eloquently described the impact of the pandemic on the people in her riding. I was particularly struck by the story of Brenda and the community artists, racialized women who are really struggling to get by in the pandemic and who do not have their voices

typically heard in the Ontario Legislature. It is so important that you raise these key questions around who will not benefit from this election reform law and what should this government be doing instead of talking about how we can increase the amount of money that goes into electoral politics.

My question to you is, how do you think the government's priorities will change when we increase the amount of big money that comes into politics?

Ms. Jill Andrew: That's a good question. I just want to say thank you to the new housing critic for her exceptional work not only in University–Rosedale but in encouraging everyone across this province to not only know that housing is a human right, but to fight for that very thing.

This bill puts money into the hands of those who are well-heeled. I'll just leave it at that. This bill is going to help prop up developers. It's going to help prop up folks who will want the ear of the government. It's not going to address our housing crisis. It's not going to address the challenges that everyday tenants face. We've got 60% or so tenants in St. Paul's. It's not going to address any of these things.

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

Ms. Lindsey Park: Maybe I'll try again, because I didn't get an answer the last time I asked my question. I said that there are specific concerns the Chief Electoral Officer raised in an independent report provided to members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. I take these reports seriously. I try to consider them and what's workable and what we can bring in in a timely way. That's why we brought this bill forward. I want to know: Does the member support that?

Ms. Jill Andrew: I'm going to try again and say what I've been saying for the last almost year, and that is: Support Ontarians. Support folks in St. Paul's. Support folks in your own riding, for goodness' sakes—sorry, through the Speaker—who need direct funding, who need direct supports so our small businesses remain, so they can live; so we can save Main Street; so people don't lose their homes; so our schools are functioning; so we have asymptomatic testing in place; so we have a robust vaccine rollout; so we have paid sick days. These are the things that matter most now, and this bill doesn't address any of them.

It addresses the Conservative government's fears. It addresses their fears for their significant failure to the people of Ontario.

1700

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): We do not have enough time for another back-and-forth, so further debate?

Ms. Suze Morrison: It's an honour today to rise and speak to this bill. Speaker, I want to be perfectly clear: This bill is nothing more than a cash grab and an obvious attempt by this government to silence their critics.

In the middle of a pandemic, when people desperately need help, and they need help in terms of the response from this government, they're not getting that help.

Instead, this Premier is trying to focus on bringing back big money into politics by letting deep-pocketed developer donors double the amount that they can give to politicians. Instead of focusing on the devastation that COVID-19 has brought on our communities, the Premier is focusing on his re-election campaign. I'm shocked, actually, that we're spending our time today debating this bill, instead of implementing the real solutions that Ontarians are expecting from us.

Speaker, this bill is about money. It's not about getting people the help that they need to get through this pandemic and giving the people of Ontario hope that there's light at the end of this tunnel. It's about opening the door for PC and Liberal donors to give tens of thousands of dollars to chosen candidates. This bill increases the individual donation limit to \$3,300, and then increases the limit by \$25 every year after that. It also increases the amount a candidate can donate to themselves from \$5,000 to \$10,000, and it increases the amount a leadership candidate can donate to themselves to \$50,000, which is double the current limit of \$25,000.

I think these donation limits are particularly important when we think about how we elect a more representative chamber that truly looks like the people of Ontario. We need more women in this House. We still do not have gender parity. If candidates are now expected to be able to raise, as first-time candidates, without deep-pocketed networks necessarily, and to be able to contribute \$10,000 to their campaigns—and if they don't have that kind of money, they're going to be set back compared to potentially incredibly well-off opponents who may have that kind of wealth to put into their own election campaigns. I think we are better served as a province when this chamber is full of women and teachers and nurses and PSWs and front-line workers and youth and people who have experienced student debt, who have grown up in poverty. Those are the voices we need in this chamber, and those aren't necessarily the voices that are going to have \$10,000, going into their first election campaign as brand new candidates, to put into their own election campaigns.

What this signals to the people of Ontario is that their voices don't belong in this House unless you come from wealth, and that's not the kind of messaging that we should be sending to young children, and particularly young girls, who are consistently underrepresented in this chamber. It's a huge step backwards, Speaker.

We all remember the era of the scandalous cash-for-access fundraisers that the past Liberal government was famous for, when it was revealed that developers and big businesses were paying thousands of dollars to attend these lavish fundraiser events where they'd have exclusive access to the Premier and to ministers. We also remember the public's reaction to that, and I can tell you, Speaker, it wasn't a fond reaction. People were frustrated that their MPPs were more focused on fundraising and holding these lavish fundraisers with millionaires, developers and land barons than actually working for their constituents.

This bill brings us right back into the era of pay-to-play, when those with the greatest financial means have better

access to political parties and have a larger voice in this chamber. This government, just like the last, is completely out of touch, just as out of touch as the Liberals were. We don't need big money coming back into Queen's Park. We don't need that. We need this place to become more equitable and more accessible to folks who are minimum-wage workers, who are educators, who are health workers, who are the people on the front lines of this pandemic, who have been completely left behind by this government and are going to be coming out of an incredibly financially difficult time.

In terms of the people of this province, the last thing they're going to have is \$3,300 in their pockets to engage in the political process. But do you know who will have \$3,300? The people who profited from this pandemic. We have seen over the pandemic a widening wealth and income gap develop between the richest in our community and the poorest, and it is only getting worse. But the rich have gotten richer during this pandemic, and the poor have gotten poorer.

So what does increasing donation limits tell the people of my community? It says, "Well, we've left you behind. We haven't provided you with the income supports you need. We haven't provided you with rent subsidies. In fact, we made it a bit easier for your billionaire corporate landlord to evict you. You've probably lost your job this year. You're probably several months behind on your rent. You probably have lost family members or community members to COVID-19. But hey, we're going to increase donation limits for your bosses and your landlords that left you completely behind this year and make it easier for them to have more influence in political spaces than you do." I think it's absolutely shameful.

Speaker, for so many people in my community, \$3,300 is not a small chunk of change. In my riding of Toronto Centre, we have a much higher proportion of residents who are living below the poverty line than the rest of the city. The barriers that low-income voters in my riding face to engaging in the political process aren't going to be solved by this bill. There are very real policy solutions that this government could, and should, be putting in place to protect those very workers and those very low-income folks in my community. They could be increasing the minimum wage so that low-wage workers don't have to work multiple part-time jobs to cover their bills. They could invest in affordable public subsidized child care. They could be making investments in affordable housing. They could be providing additional supports to family caregivers, recognizing the important role that those folks play in ensuring that our seniors are able to stay at home right now, instead of forcing them into the disaster that our long-term-care homes have become. All of these measures are ones that would help the people who are living paycheck to paycheck.

They don't need an increase to the donation limit. The previous donation limit, which was at about \$1,650—most people can't afford that as it is; most people can't afford that. In fact, most of the political donations that I receive come in in amounts of \$25 and \$50 at a time, and I'm fairly

sure that's the case for most of my fellow NDP colleagues. My donation base is front-line workers, minimum wage workers in my community who believe in something better and that they deserve better in their community, that they deserve a higher minimum wage, that they deserve things like pharmacare and dental care. They want a government that has those interests at heart, not the interests of developers and the Galen Westons of the world. Those are not the interests, in terms of the front-line workers, that this government seems to share.

I want to contextualize what people in my community are experiencing right now to help this government really understand just entirely how out of touch they are. I want to share with you about the folks who are reaching out to my office for help, what's keeping them up at night and what they have yet to see from this government that will actually give them hope.

Since we returned to the Legislature—we've been back a few weeks now—my NDP colleagues and I have brought forward a number of proposals that would give people the help they need and hope for the future. This government has voted down every single one of those. These are proposals that have been widely and loudly called for by experts and community members all over the province, things that we know would make a substantial difference in people's lives, bills and motions that are the actions and investments that we need to implement in order to put this pandemic in our rear-view mirror. What we don't need is an increase to contribution limits.

The first proposal that we put forward was paid sick days. New Democrats have been fighting for paid sick days for years. Right now, those sick days have never been more important. A paid sick day is what would allow a personal support worker with a cough to stay home instead of going into their long-term-care home and risk becoming a vector for COVID-19. It would allow a sick factory worker to stay home instead of starting a massive outbreak at their facility, like the one we saw at Canada Post in Mississauga. That had a huge effect on that facility. It delayed people's mail during an essential time. That outbreak wasn't necessary. We can do better.

1710

An estimated 60% of Ontarians don't have permanent paid sick days, and that number is much higher among low-income workers in sectors like food service, hospitality and retail. Those same sectors that have the least access to paid sick days are the same ones that are predominantly worked by racialized and immigrant workers. It's the newcomer and Black and Indigenous and racialized folks in our community who are predominantly doing the lowest-paid jobs with no paid sick leave. They're the ones being asked to carry the burden of this pandemic on their shoulders and aren't being supported by this government to do it.

Paid sick days have been endorsed by mayors, by municipalities, by medical officers of health and public health experts, as well as by the Ontario Federation of Labour and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. We know that paid sick days are vital to stopping the spread of

COVID. They are key to avoiding another lockdown, more outbreaks and closed businesses. Every one of us in this Legislature has paid sick days, but many essential workers, the very folks we've been calling heroes since the start of this pandemic, don't. This government has blocked every attempt my colleagues have made to expedite the passage of the NDP's Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, and they voted against the bill at second reading.

Instead of considering how we can provide workers with paid sick days during a pandemic, we're here instead debating a bill that will bring big money back into politics. I have to ask this government, where are your priorities? Where are they? It's not this and it's not here, and it's shameful.

Speaker, I wish we were focusing on the priorities that really matter, like safer schools, for example. That's something that I'd rather be in this House debating right now than increasing election spending limits.

This fall, I spoke to hundreds of people in my riding worried about the return to school. They are frustrated that this government is refusing to spend the money needed to keep our classrooms safe. Many folks in my community who live in multi-generational households, particularly where they care for elderly family members, are incredibly worried about what will happen if their child becomes sick at school and then brings that COVID-19 into the home and puts the whole family at risk, including the elders who are staying at home with the family.

I've also heard from education workers who were already stressed and exhausted before the school year even started. Many headed back into classrooms with almost 30 students. They're worried about their own health and safety as educators, but they're also worried about how own earth they are supposed to keep 30 kids in a classroom safe.

We know now, as we've seen with recent outbreaks and school closures, these fears were not misplaced. There are very real risks for students and education workers right now that this provincial government has done nothing to address.

Ontario reported 175 new school-based cases of COVID-19, and the advocacy group parents for education recently released a study showing that education leaders' top concern is crowded classes where students can't physically distance. With the outbreaks of variants in our schools, the risks for education workers, for students and for their families have become even greater.

When we returned to this Legislature, my colleague from Davenport, who's here with us today, brought forward a motion calling for urgent changes to make schools safer and give parents and kids hope that schools would stay open this time, and safely. To keep our schools open, we have to make them safe, and to do that, we need the investments to get our class sizes down. I don't know how this government expects our schools to be safe with 30 kids in a classroom. Our NDP motion that we brought forward—and again, thank you to my colleague the member for Davenport for doing this—would have capped class sizes at 15 and instituted a comprehensive in-school

COVID-19 testing program and improved air quality in schools. But again, this government blocked that proposal as well.

Now, instead of turning the attention of this House to important issues like how we get class sizes under control, we are here debating increasing the spending limit in elections to \$3,300. I don't know that I could find an education worker in this province who, after this year, after the kind of money they spend out of pocket stocking their classrooms with their own supplies because their budgets are so tight, can afford \$3,300 a year to give to a political party. It doesn't benefit those workers; it doesn't benefit those families whose lives are at risk.

Speaker, let's talk about small businesses next. This government likes to tell us every day how they're the party for small business, but in my community, I have witnessed every single day how this government has left small businesses in Toronto Centre behind, over and over again.

Earlier today, during question period, my colleague from Hamilton Mountain asked the government to do more to help our small businesses. She spoke about how businesses in her riding have been waiting weeks, if not months, to receive the grants that this government promised them, which were supposed to be the lifeline for the small business community. I've heard similar concerns from small businesses in my community. Some are waiting upwards of seven weeks to receive the grant funding that this government promised.

On top of that, we're talking about funding that falls short of what businesses in my riding need. It's a cookie-cutter approach across the province. Commercial rents in my riding of Toronto Centre are upwards of \$10,000 to \$20,000 a month. I know of businesses on Church Street that are paying \$17,000 a month in rent, and they've been closed for a year. Start doing the math on that. We've got small businesses in my community that are now \$300,000 in debt just in rent and utilities, never mind what they're on the hook for in terms of payroll or the staff they've laid off.

It's not going to be like flipping a switch to get these businesses dug out of the hole that they're in. I was talking to one business owner in my community last week who said that he's in the hole \$300,000. I said, "If you could open your business at full capacity tomorrow, how long would it take you to get out of debt, to get back to zero?" And he said, "Maybe three years."

By the time we get to the fall, fingers crossed—hopefully, this government gets their head out of the sand on the vaccine rollout and we get somewhere with that and we are able to open our businesses maybe by, what, next Christmas? Let's say we flip that switch and those small businesses start operating by Christmastime at maybe 75% capacity. Then what? What supports are we looking at then? It can't just be, "Oh, look. COVID is over. We got some vaccines out. Small businesses, good luck." We need to be talking about a comprehensive exit ramp strategy here that is going to be several years of supports that these businesses are going to need.

I don't know how this government expects the small businesses in my community to dig themselves out of

\$300,000 of debt at the flip of a switch. The supports that they are supposedly getting from this government while they're waiting, what, almost two months to receive funding from a grant program—it's outrageous. It's absolutely outrageous.

In our first weeks back, my NDP colleagues and I proposed several small business supports, which included direct rent supports, to help small businesses stay open and pay their bills, and this government also dismissed that solution. We know that their approach to supporting small businesses just hasn't been working.

Speaker, this government's priorities are so deeply misplaced. I would honestly rather be debating just about anything else in this chamber tonight than increasing spending limits in the Election Act to \$3,300. Families and small businesses across this province are hurting; they're really hurting. People have lost their family members this year. They have lost their businesses. They have lost their jobs. Many haven't been able to pay rent all year and are one of tens of thousands of families facing eviction during the eviction crisis. There are families in my riding that are upwards of \$20,000 in debt to their landlords, through no fault of their own. We're talking about families that have never paid rent a day late in their lives—not a day late. They lost their jobs this year because of COVID-19. They didn't get the supports from either the provincial or federal governments that they needed and they fell behind. Here we are, saying, "Hey, big money," rolling out the big carpet. Let's make more space in our political sphere for the large actors, the fat cats and the big donors, with the kinds of deep pockets that can write a cheque for \$3,200 without even batting an eye. I don't know anyone in my community that cannot bat an eye over writing a \$3,200 cheque.

Interjection.

Ms. Suze Morrison: It's \$3,300. Thank you so much: \$3,300. It's outrageous.

I'm asking the government members: Work with us. We have put forward a number of bills and motions over the last two weeks that would really, tangibly change the lives of people in Ontario. It's the priorities that Ontarians want us working towards to address the things that they need to get through this pandemic. I'm asking you not to turn your backs on your communities, on all of Ontario. Come to the table, work with us on meaningful supports and leave the big money out of politics.

1720

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Before we go to questions and comments, I'd beg to inform the House that pursuant to standing order 101(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Cho, Willowdale, assumes ballot item number 62 and Mr. Babikian assumes ballot item number 67.

Questions and comments?

Hon. Paul Calandra: This is my first opportunity to rise after the historic vote earlier today where the NDP switched 50 years of ideology and supported us on the value of pipelines and the importance of pipelines for

transporting natural resources. I want to thank them for that. I didn't think it would be something we would see, and we saw it today. So thank you for that.

Let me also say to the members opposite: I've been moved by what I've heard today, especially from the member who just spoke and said—I may get the quote wrong—that she'd rather be debating almost anything else other than this. So I wonder if she would agree that we collapse debate on this now, we move to send this bill to committee next week, and we move to the PMB of the member for Ottawa Centre.

Ms. Suze Morrison: I'd like to thank the government House leader for his question. As much as I would love to be debating any other bill in this House, your government has done everything in their power to block debate on the very bills we need to be debating, so here we are.

If your government hadn't voted no on the unanimous consent for us to accelerate the passage of the bill to ban evictions, we could be talking about banning evictions right now. If your government hadn't voted no on unanimous consent for the bill to bring in paid sick days for every worker in this province, we could be here having this debate right now. If your government hadn't voted no on the bill we put forward to raise the wage for personal support workers in our long-term-care homes, we could be debating that bill right now.

But instead, here we are, discussing a bill to raise contribution limits in our political system to \$3,300.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to thank the member from Toronto Centre for her very thoughtful comments. I have to say, I really appreciated this afternoon hearing my colleagues on this side of the House bringing the voices, the stories and the priorities of their communities, which are very similar to the priorities of my community and the people of Davenport and I think of most people around the province in this moment, as we sit in the middle of a global pandemic.

But they do not appear, unfortunately, to be the priorities of this government. I appreciated just now the question from the government's side, because I have to say, we've been waiting for the government side to put up some speakers. They don't want to speak to this bill. I wonder why. Because you know what? It's embarrassing. It's shameful, this bill.

My question to the member from Toronto Centre is, if she could speak to the rationale of this government for prioritizing this bill—

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

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you so much for the question. If I had to speculate on the rationale behind this bill, I would suggest that the governing members, through this bill, are going to have a much easier time in the next election. We know that, as New Democrats, our donation base is primarily made up of many smaller donations. Their donations come from a very small number of donors who are able to give much larger amounts. What they've

gone and said to their deep-pocketed donors is, “Don’t worry. We’re going to double the amount that you can fundraise and contribute to garner favour with the government members in the political process.” I think that it’s entirely self-interested.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock. I would remind all members—that was a very careful line that you walked, but I want people to be very clear. We do not impute motive, and we cannot speak to anyone’s motivation. As much fun as it might be to speculate, that is not our role in this House.

I will continue with further questions and comments. Resume the clock.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for her comments. First of all, let me point out that corporate and union donations were banned—I think it was in 2017—and that continues, so there are only individual donations allowed in the province of Ontario.

But the member has talked about having more women and others participating in the electoral process, and this bill actually does make it easier. For example, one of the changes is that, in the nomination process, you’re not required to do audited statements. In fact, that was recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer, and the member from Waterloo, Catherine Fife, said at standing committee, “The intention when the PCs brought this forward—essentially, this removes the requirement that a nomination contestant would have to appoint an auditor. While we haven’t agreed” on everything, “obviously, we feel this would be” less “onerous” and help people.

So I hope the member recognizes, and I hope she’ll support that.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. If the member opposite is really interested in increasing the diversity and representation of this chamber, as I said earlier in my debate, this bill increases the personal contribution limits of an individual candidate from \$5,000 to \$10,000. So if I’m a single mom running to represent my community, and I don’t have \$10,000 to donate to my own campaign, and I’m running against a millionaire developer whose interests in this chamber are to come and put developer interests first—the voices that are lacking in this chamber are not the voices that represent developers; we’ve got lots of that covered on the opposite bench. Do you know whose voices are missing in this chamber? Single moms. I want more single moms in this House. To get more single moms in this House, they need to not be immediately set 10 yards behind the start line because they can’t afford the same contributions as the wealthy candidates they’re going to be running against.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Toronto Centre for your very powerful comments. I was looking at this bill, and I was trying to find some positive things in it. There are some things that I think could potentially be positive. One is to have 10 advance poll days; it’s currently five. The catch is that there’s no detail yet on whether the hours will be the same for all 10 days.

But the reason why I bring this up is because there are some things in the election rules which are worthy of deeper investigation. I was hoping that you could share a bit about your experience with the election rules in Toronto Centre in the 2018 election.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you to my colleague from University–Rosedale for the question. Specifically, in 2018, in Toronto Centre, one of the things that we consistently witnessed is the unequitable placement of polling stations in my riding that, I would argue, distinctly disadvantages folks from lower socio-economic communities from actually fully engaging in election day.

Specifically, we have a collection of three high-rise towers that are all low-income buildings. Of those three towers, typically in an election, one of those three buildings will get a polling station that all three buildings have to share. On the surface level, it looks really convenient: “Hey, I can go right next door and vote.” But the reality is, when you look at the voter turnout from one building to the next to the next, the only one of those three buildings that ever sees any significant voter turnout in an election year is the only one with the polling station.

Meanwhile, on Bay Street, the Bay Street condos that we have in my community will often have a polling station for every single building. I think it would be a worthwhile endeavour to further investigate—

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I’ve listened very intently to what the member has said. I recognize the member for Davenport and I appreciate her recognizing the fact that we aren’t filibustering the bill and that it’s actually the NDP who are filibustering this bill. So I quite sincerely say to the member across: We are prepared, after almost seven hours of debate, to send this bill to committee immediately. I wonder if the member opposite, who has talked about all of the other things that are a priority to her—the member for St. Paul’s did that and a number of other members have done that—if they would consider ending the filibuster on this piece of legislation and sending it to committee for further consideration right now.

1730

Ms. Suze Morrison: Back to the government House leader: I would assume that the House leader for a governing party would understand that we don’t have filibusters in our standing orders. We have debate rotations. Once every member has been given an opportunity of 20 minutes or 10 minutes to speak to a bill, those are the limits of our debate and we can’t go beyond that.

What I would question back to the government House leader, about why he’s so eager to shut down debate on this bill is, are you embarrassed by what you’ve put forward? I think it’s been really clear that the people of Ontario are saying, and your opposition is saying, that these are not the right priorities for us right now. We need to be focusing on the housing crisis, on COVID-19. We don’t need to be increasing donation spending limits. Are you embarrassed by this bill? Is that why you’re trying—

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I do appreciate the opportunity to rise on debate following the speech from the member for Toronto Centre, Madam Speaker. I find it very ironic that every member of the NDP caucus has risen in their place and talked about how they want to talk about other things. They want to move on and speak about all of the important things that we've done on COVID and measures to improve Ontario's response to COVID.

Now, Madam Speaker, let's bear in mind that on most of the initiatives that we brought forward on COVID, the NDP has voted against those initiatives—initiatives which have seen Ontario, frankly, lead the way in terms of its response. The member from Northumberland was very clear on all of the things that we did with respect to COVID, not only in the COVID but as we were approaching COVID, whether it was long-term care, whether it was medium and small hospital funding, all of which were very, very important.

We've brought a bill forward with respect to the Election Act, a bill that the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka and the member for Perth–Wellington and a number of other members—Flamborough–Glanbrook—they've all talked about why this bill is important right now. They talked about the fact that the Chief Electoral Officer has reached out and had made important recommendations that he felt had to be put in the Election Act.

The member asked, am I embarrassed? No, I'm never embarrassed to make elections better in the province of Ontario. I actually take it very seriously, Madam Speaker. I take it very seriously. That is one of the most important things that we will do in this chamber, ensure that the elections that follow are treated fairly, that they are run in a manner that is fair to all of the people of the province of Ontario. I am surprised to hear, for the NDP, that is not a priority, that they don't think that is an important function of what legislators should do. I cringe at the thought of if the people who had sat in these seats before us had that very same attitude as we're hearing from the NDP today. We take that responsibility very seriously in this place.

The other thing is that, of course, we can do more than one thing at one time. The reason that we can do that, Madam Speaker, is because we have done a very good job together—granted, together—along with the staff and the team here in the Legislature, of making sure that this Parliament can continue to sit, that we're actually here debating things. They have the opportunity to be here debating, filibustering a bill that they say they don't want to talk about, and continuing debate on a bill because we have done everything that we could to make sure that the opposition could hold the government accountable throughout this pandemic. In Ontario, this Legislature has led the way in North America in making sure that that happens.

Imagine—imagine for a second, if you will—if we were to follow the advice of the members opposite. “Let's not talk about elections,” they say. “It's not important.” It's not important to the NDP how we elect people. It's not

important to make sure that elections are run safely. It's not important to the NDP to ensure that people have the opportunity to vote safely. It's not important that in a riding like Northumberland and in a riding like Parry Sound–Muskoka, where they have great distances to go to get to a polling station, that they have more opportunities to vote. I would suggest, Madam Speaker—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order. The member for Toronto–St. Paul's, come to order.

Hon. Paul Calandra:—that the reason it's not important to the NDP is because they're so rarely successful in elections, Madam Speaker. That's why they don't consider elections important, because if they were more successful at elections, then maybe they would feel that the role of a legislator to ensure that elections are run fairly in the future is an important job. The government will ensure that that continues. It is our responsibility, but it's not just the government's responsibility, it's all of our responsibility. There is nothing more important in a parliamentary democracy, in a democracy, than the fair functioning of an election—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Come to order now.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Can you imagine, colleagues—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I apologize to the government House leader that I have to cut him off in the middle of his speech.

I'm going to ask all members to listen quietly. I won't speak to how challenging that may be for some of them but, right now, the government House leader has the floor and the rotation being what it is, members will have the opportunity to challenge him or comment when it's their turn. I've asked everyone to come to order, and I won't do it again.

I apologize to the member. Please continue.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know it's tough for the opposition because they're caught in a quandary, right? Because after me, there will be another member who will rise in their place and talk about how we should be talking about anything else, but when given the opportunity to move this to committee, they said no. When given the opportunity to move on to other business, including important private member's business from the member, I believe, from Ottawa Centre, they said no, Madam Speaker.

The member opposite talks about unanimous consent and why we didn't offer to approve unanimous consent on pieces of legislation or motions that we may not have even seen or may not have even debated in this House. I guess it really speaks to why they don't care about elections. They don't care about legislation either. They'd rather circumvent the entire process of debate, put a motion on the floor for unanimous consent to move on. Why bother being here? This is the same party that asked for a Zoom Parliament, and we said, “No, we'll be here and we'll do our job.”

I know full well that the members opposite will not in any way approve that this legislation moves to a committee today. I know they will continue to filibuster by putting speaker after speaker after speaker to bemoan the fact that they're debating something they don't want to debate. It is part of why the NDP, I will submit to you, Madam Speaker, never forms government.

And today of all days, colleagues—today, we saw something remarkable happen in this place. This is why I thought it would be different this afternoon. For 50 years, this party across the way has been against pipelines, has been against natural resources. They have wanted to close them down. Today, we saw a dramatic shift for the first time by the NDP—the first time. They not only supported pipelines, but agreed that the best way to transport natural resources, the safest way to transport natural resources, which the motion identifies the thousands of jobs that creates, was through pipelines. What a remarkable change in policy that is for the NDP. I thought we had seen, finally, a change. Now, granted they voted against line 5 twice before that. They voted against line 5 twice before that, but they then voted in favour of pipelines and the safety of pipelines, so I thought it would be different.

I am encouraged. This is something that, of course, I'm going to be sending to my colleagues in Ottawa. I know that the leader of the federal NDP party was once a member in this chamber. I can only imagine that they are sending a copy of that motion and that change to their colleagues across the country because this was a dramatic shift. I thought today we would see a change in the NDP because of that.

But what do we see? Back to the same old NDP: filibuster; say one thing, do something else. That is not the way you—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I will ask the member to withdraw that part of his remarks.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I withdraw, Madam Speaker. I withdraw that part of the remarks.

Look, in the final analysis, it can be up to the NDP—and it will be up to the NDP; it's certainly not going to be up to the Liberals to do anything about it. It will be up to the NDP, and the other parties, frankly, in this chamber, to explain to the people in Ontario why they thought improving elections in this province was not an important part of the job they do on behalf of their constituents. I think it is the most important thing that we will do as legislators in this term, bar none. It is our responsibility to make sure that elections are done fairly. It's our responsibility to do all that we can to ensure that more people have access to an election, that they get out there and have that opportunity. The opportunity that so many generations have fought for, they think is a waste of time and unimportant. Well, obviously, we think differently. We think differently.

1740

I would ask the members opposite, on a historic day for the NDP, when although—and we saw it. I know the member for Davenport referenced that a lot of us weren't

speaking on this, because we thought we would get it to committee. But I remember on the take-note debate on line 5, I think only one member of the NDP spoke in four and a half hours, and then we saw them vote against line 5 twice. But ultimately, because of the hard work of the member for Sarnia–Lambton and a number of other members, they agreed that pipelines were the safest way. I am sure, across this country, that NDP members of Legislatures, of parties, are reflecting on that support. That's why I was so confident that today would be a different day.

I regret the fact that the NDP do not want to see this bill go to committee, but I can assure the member opposite, despite the filibustering, despite their hesitancy, we'll go to committee, we'll hear more voices of the people of the province of Ontario, because it's important that we do so.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: It's always a pleasure to listen to the government House leader speak here. I just have a simple question: Why is this government raising the personal donation limit to \$3,300 and doubling it? Why specifically are you doing that?

Hon. Paul Calandra: It is one of the measures in a whole suite of proposals. Part of the other measures that the members aren't talking about—I mean, I hope that they agree with the extension of early voting, but another part of that is allowing independents—who we have put so much power back into the hands of through this Parliament, allowing them to have the ability to raise funds. Imagine how important that would have been to the NDP on those many occasions when they didn't reach party status and they were considered independents.

We're making sure that people are treated fairly. The donation limit is one of those very important parts of the puzzle. I think, when taken as a whole, I hope that they will consider voting in favour of this, or explaining to people why they don't think those measures were important to them.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: There's a provision in this that would extend the advance polling to a longer period of time. In my riding, we had more than 64% of the population vote, which was above what the provincial average was, but in one particular area of the riding, we had less than 50%.

I talked to a number of people. One resident from my riding—I'll refer to him as Gary; his name is not actually Gary. I asked him: "Did you vote?" He said, "No." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because I work in a mine in northern Ontario, and we have a three-week rotation. I was not able to vote on election day because I was in northern Ontario, and the advance polls were not available because I was up north." How is this going to help someone like Gary?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member from Peterborough couldn't be more right in what he's saying. It's almost a depressing example that we've had to wait this long in the province of Ontario to get to a system where a guy like Gary can ensure that he has the right to vote. It's our job,

for crying out loud. Why is it that the opposition NDP are so afraid of having people exercise their right to vote? I don't get it. I encourage and want people to get out there and vote. I think it's healthy for democracy. Believe me, I've won and I've lost, Madam Speaker, but I would never fight against people having the right to vote.

So you're exactly right. Including more advance polling days will ensure a guy like Gary and many others will have the opportunity to vote, a vote that they haven't been able to exercise in so long. I would only say to Gary, I apologize that it's taken so long for us to get here. Had the Liberals not dropped the ball with the support of the NDP for so long, Gary would have had the right to vote in the last election—

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: Ontario is seventh in Canada amongst provinces for per capita vaccines. We are 10th when it includes territories. Small businesses are shutting down across the board. There have been thousands of deaths and thousands more infected by COVID-19. The member from Humber River–Black Creek appropriately asked the House leader how he could justify an increase in donation limits at this kind of time, a time of economic calamity. He did not answer the question.

I'm going to pose this question to the House leader again, and I'll add an additional point to it: At this time of economic devastation, how you can justify increasing—now, answer the question. Through you, Speaker, please, I implore the member to answer the question. How can you justify increasing donation limits and also increasing an individual's contribution to themselves, doubling it from \$5,000 to \$10,000, at this time, at this place, during a pandemic?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I would say this: If I put my name on a ballot and I want to support my ability to seek office, I think it's important for me to be able to contribute. Increasing the donation limits: I'm not sure how the NDP fundraise, but we don't tell people you have to donate to the maximum. It is an opportunity that you have to support a party of your choice. I'm surprised to hear that the NDP make it a mandatory thing, Madam Speaker.

But let me say this, since the member asked the question: I would suggest to him to allow debate to collapse if he wants to talk about other things. Let's send this to committee today, and we can start debating many other things like, for instance, the support of pipelines that the NDP has shown today. I certainly hope that this member will reach out to his brother, who is the leader of the federal NDP, and express how he voted in favour of the pipelines today, and maybe we can get some pipelines to the west coast, to the east coast, and we can have economic expansion like this province and this country has never seen. I thank him for his support earlier today, though; I'll tell you that.

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

Mr. David Piccini: I thank the member for his remarks today. I think he has exposed a number of contradictions

in our friends on the other side of the aisle. One of the interesting pieces I'd like him to comment on: They've talked a lot—and again, the contradictions here are about empowering individuals. When I think to the importance of the electoral process and empowering individuals, it doesn't mean empowering third-party, faceless PACs and numbered corporations. I think the contradiction and why the opposition don't want to talk about this is because they would rather those groups dictate the outcome; they would rather those groups influence Ontarians, because they won't sell Ontarians to the merits of their own arguments.

Can the member explain to us why it's important that we remove these third-party influences and PACs that have contributed to a polarization of discourse in the United States?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the government House leader to respond. Sorry, I have too much going on.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The member from Northumberland has raised a good point. In fact, I believe it was the member for Humber River–Black Creek who also raised a point earlier in support, I would have thought, when he talked about Ontario Proud. We want to take the influence of these third parties out of elections. They have an important role to play; don't get me wrong, Madam Speaker. That's why the legislation allows them to continue to play an important role. But I think all members would agree that that role should be fair. Like political parties that have rules to follow, we would expect that third parties would have the rules to follow as well.

But they should not be allowed to influence an election in a detrimental way. That's our job. It's my job to win. When I lost an election, I lost because people weren't supporting me. I lost an election. When you win an election, it should be because of you, not because of the outside influence of third parties, whether it's outside of the country or outside of the province. It should be because you win or lose on your merits.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: It's always a pleasure to listen the government House leader, particularly hearkening back to those illustrious days in Ottawa and his career there.

The depth of this government's indifference to the intelligence of Ontario voters is really astonishing. The House leader refers to caring about elections and uses that as, I would argue, perhaps a bit of a way to divert attention from what this bill is really about, which is about increasing donation limits to \$3,300 in the middle of a global pandemic.

1750

I wondered if the member opposite would care to comment: When did the government care about elections? Was it when they were taking away the democratic rights of all of those local municipalities to determine how they want to conduct elections?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The only people talking against democratic elections today are the members of the NDP and the member for Davenport. We brought forward a very comprehensive bill that would improve people's ability to access their vote: additional opportunities for advance polls, additional opportunities for independents to play a greater role in politics, a number of recommendations brought forward by the Chief Electoral Officer of the province of Ontario, all to improve, guess what, an election. The only people who are speaking against that today are the NDP and the Liberals. Those two parties are obviously against the elimination of third parties influencing elections.

We will continue to stand up for fair democratic elections, as I've done my entire time. I'm very proud of my time in Ottawa, and I'm proud of what we've accomplished here. Look, every time we've tried to improve democracy, even in this place, the NDP have voted against it, so I'm not shocked today that they're against fair and free elections.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: It's always an honour and a privilege to rise as the member for Humber River–Black Creek, my lifelong home.

In the limited time I have today, I certainly do want to talk about this issue, because I actually think this issue is very important, but for differing reasons than the government. The government wants to talk about electoral reform. I think that they're very knowledgeable on elections because, as we learned from the 407 scandal and so many different issues, the PC Party has lots and lots of information on what it is to abuse elections—not the government, the PC Party, of course. I would not impugn or discuss that about the government itself. So they're very uniquely positioned to be able to understand abuse of elections because, heck, there are some masters in there at doing that.

Now, I'm a realist as well. If we collapse debate today, that would just mean that the day would be shortened, no new business would be called, and government members would get to go home. But you know, New Democrats love to work, and so we're here, and I'm going to tell you, I'm going to say that certainly I want to talk—

Hon. Paul Calandra: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I would certainly seek the unanimous consent of the members to extend debate to 7 o'clock tonight.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to extend the evening debate until 7 o'clock. Is it agreed? I heard a no.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I have asked repeatedly for this House to come to order. So we're

going to manage to get through this evening in order. I return to the—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I don't need the commentary, thank you. I'm going to rule as I see fit. Thank you.

I return to the member from Humber River–Black Creek.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you very much, Speaker. We've heard the line, "Liberal, Tory, same old story." One of the things that I always appreciated about Conservatives, or usually about Conservatives, was that they were generally unabashed in their beliefs. They would state their positions, usually, what they believe in. Since becoming a member here, I may have had to change a little bit of my opinion on this, because often I find in bills, they front-load stuff that may be okay, but with questionable stuff in the back end. And certainly within this bill, it puts in a return to the old days where the wealthiest among us control elections, give large amounts of money and ultimately—and the risk here—influence policy.

Now, one of the first times I came to the chamber, I actually got to hear the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke in a very passionate speech. In fact, he's certainly one of the most passionate speakers, whether he's standing, or sitting and someone else is talking. I'd like to say that that member was talking about, at the time, when the Liberals were privatizing hydro—again, it's interesting, because Conservatives, about 100 years ago, were responsible for public hydro. How far they've changed in this province, because they started to open that door on it.

I brought out the Hansard, which is surprisingly interesting reading, and he was talking about the cash-for-access fundraisers of the Liberals. He said, "Because, let's face it, Speaker, some of those people who have been at cash-for-access fundraisers—and I have some information that I'll talk about here—I've invited those same people to fundraisers of mine as the lowly critic for energy. But they couldn't make mine, because I'm not the minister. So for them to say they now want to stop this idea of cash-for-access is very, very sanctimonious because, quite frankly, they reaped the benefits of that for a long, long time."

I shared with you something from an article where a developer worth almost \$4 billion was giving lots and lots of money to the Liberals, and now, since they're no longer a party here in the Legislature but a group of independents, they've switched over, and this one family has given—what we know—\$15,000 in the last two years to the Conservative Party.

I've given other examples. We spoke about a third-party Conservative advertiser. There are three developers alone that gave \$150,000 to that third-party advertiser and an additional \$116,000 to the government, to the tune of a quarter of a million dollars. And what happened? This government got elected, and we have seen the most pro-developer, pro-MZO party in the history of politics, dare I say, certainly in Ontario, maybe across this entire country. At a time of a pandemic, when the wealthiest among us

have made over \$63 billion and regular, everyday Ontarians are fighting to put food on their table, this government is increasing donation limits.

I want to say, there are a lot of people who have become a lot more rich because of this government, and a lot of people, the lion's share, who are seeing harder outcomes in life. I know that those people are tripping over each other, and I don't have to prove it today. All you have to do is look, following this legislation, to see where the money comes from and how much they raise.

But I also want to point something out, and I want to read a very important Globe and Mail article in the limited time I have left. While some of the richest are going to trip over each other to give money to these guys, because they're getting even richer, some—and I'm going to read this Globe and Mail headline: The Premier "Holds \$1,250-a-Head Private Fundraiser That Industry Groups Said They Felt Pressure to Attend." Look at this. Here it is. I'm going to quote this really quickly here. Well, I'll summarize it: Basically, it goes on to say that these individuals, these industry leaders, spoke anonymously and said that they were pressured to attend this fundraiser. And so, who was it? The government went out and hired lobbyists, big-name lobbyists, to then go to these stakeholders, many who made a lot of money under the Liberal government when the switchover to privatized hydro was made.

The same players are back here once again, spending money hand over fist to try to influence policy. And what we have seen—time will tell. But I can show you, and I can say this unreservedly: What we have seen is a government that has been nothing short of a physical manifestation of the development industry here in this chamber.

When we talked about reforming new home warranties in the province of Ontario, while all the consumers came and spoke one after the other, one group spoke in defense of the government, and vigorously. It was the Ontario Home Builders' Association—the single group. Developers reach deep into their pockets, and you will see, come next election, just how much money was contributed and who those MZOs went out to, because certainly, absolutely and unequivocally, you will find a direct link.

I don't want to impute motives, because I've spoken to many of these government members in the hallways as individuals, and I have tremendous respect for the individuals. But it's strange how sometimes the sum of its parts becomes something different—

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

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm sorry to interrupt the member, but it being six o'clock, it is now time for private members' public business.

Report continues in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
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Cho, Stan (PC)	Willowdale	
Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
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Fee, Amy (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre
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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Parm (PC)	Milton	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gravelle, Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Hardeman, Hon. / L'hon. Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor—Tecumseh	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
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Ke, Vincent (PC)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
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Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
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Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonnell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Miller, Norman (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
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Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
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Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
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Phillips, Rod (PC)	Ajax	
Piccini, David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
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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

Chair / Président: Gilles Bisson
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 la justice

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
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

Chair / Président: Kaleed Rasheed
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 des comptes publics

Chair / Président: Taras Natyshak
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Jessica Bell, Stephen Blais
Stephen Crawford, Rudy Cuzzetto
France Gélinas, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Taras Natyshak
Michael Parsa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

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

Chair / Président: Logan Kanapathi
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Fraser
Will Bouma, John Fraser
Logan Kanapathi, Vincent Ke
Laura Mae Lindo, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Jeremy Roberts
Dave Smith, Daisy Wai
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

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

Chair / Président: Deepak Anand
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Bhutila Karpoche
Deepak Anand, Aris Babikian
Jeff Burch, Amy Fee
Michael Gravelle, Joel Harden
Mike Harris, Christine Hogarth
Belinda C. Karahalios, Bhutila Karpoche
Natalia Kusendova
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

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

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Tom Rakocevic
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John Fraser, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Robin Martin
Sam Oosterhoff, Lindsey Park
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