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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Wednesday 21 April 2021 / Mercredi 21 avril 2021

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Protecting the People of Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2021, Bill 269, Mr. Bethlenfalvy / Loi de 2021 visant à protéger la population ontarienne (mesures budgétaires), projet de loi 269, M. Bethlenfalvy

Ms. Marit Stiles.....	12835
Mr. Jim McDonell.....	12838
Mr. Jeff Burch.....	12838
Hon. Jill Dunlop.....	12838
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong.....	12839
Mr. Stan Cho.....	12839

Private members' public business

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls).....	12839
---	-------

Protecting the People of Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2021, Bill 269, Mr. Bethlenfalvy / Loi de 2021 visant à protéger la population ontarienne (mesures budgétaires), projet de loi 269, M. Bethlenfalvy

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios.....	12839
Mr. Mike Harris.....	12841
Mr. Jeff Burch.....	12841
Mr. Stan Cho.....	12841
Mr. Sol Mamakwa.....	12842
Mr. Robert Bailey.....	12842
Mr. Michael Mantha.....	12842
Mr. Lorne Coe.....	12843
Ms. Sandy Shaw.....	12845
Mr. Norman Miller.....	12845
Third reading debate deemed adjourned.....	12845

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

COVID-19 immunization

Mr. Jeff Burch.....	12845
---------------------	-------

Volunteers

Mr. Jim McDonell.....	12846
-----------------------	-------

Indigenous affairs

Mr. Sol Mamakwa.....	12846
----------------------	-------

Infrastructure funding

Mr. Norman Miller.....	12846
------------------------	-------

COVID-19 response

Mr. Michael Mantha.....	12846
-------------------------	-------

Environmental protection

Mr. John Fraser.....	12847
----------------------	-------

COVID-19 immunization

Mr. Mike Harris.....	12847
----------------------	-------

Stewart Cruikshank

Mr. Peter Tabuns.....	12847
-----------------------	-------

Holocaust memorial

Mrs. Robin Martin.....	12847
------------------------	-------

Small business

Mr. David Piccini.....	12848
------------------------	-------

QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

COVID-19 response

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	12848
-------------------------	-------

Hon. Paul Calandra.....	12849
-------------------------	-------

COVID-19 response

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	12849
-------------------------	-------

Hon. Paul Calandra.....	12849
-------------------------	-------

COVID-19 response

Ms. Sara Singh.....	12850
---------------------	-------

Hon. Paul Calandra.....	12851
-------------------------	-------

Border security

Mr. Dave Smith.....	12851
---------------------	-------

Hon. Paul Calandra.....	12851
-------------------------	-------

COVID-19 response

Mr. Michael Mantha.....	12852
-------------------------	-------

Hon. Paul Calandra.....	12852
-------------------------	-------

COVID-19 response

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios.....	12852
---------------------------------	-------

Hon. Sylvia Jones.....	12853
------------------------	-------

Border security

Mr. Dave Smith.....	12853
---------------------	-------

Hon. Paul Calandra.....	12853
-------------------------	-------

COVID-19 immunization

Ms. Sandy Shaw.....	12854
---------------------	-------

Hon. Christine Elliott.....	12854
-----------------------------	-------

COVID-19 response

Mme Lucille Collard.....	12854
--------------------------	-------

Hon. Sylvia Jones.....	12855
------------------------	-------

Hon. Paul Calandra.....	12855
-------------------------	-------

Border security

Mr. Dave Smith.....	12855
---------------------	-------

Hon. Paul Calandra.....	12855
-------------------------	-------

COVID-19 response

Mr. Joel Harden.....	12856
----------------------	-------

Hon. Christine Elliott.....	12856
-----------------------------	-------

COVID-19 response

Mr. John Fraser	12857
Hon. Christine Elliott	12857
Hon. Paul Calandra	12857

COVID-19 immunization

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	12857
Hon. Christine Elliott	12858

COVID-19 immunization

Ms. Mitzie Hunter	12858
Hon. Christine Elliott	12858

Estimates

Hon. Paul Calandra	12858
The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott)	12858

**REPORTS BY COMMITTEES /
RAPPORTS DE COMITÉS****Standing Committee on Regulations and Private
Bills**

Mr. Logan Kanapathi	12859
Report adopted	12859

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private
Bills**

Mr. Logan Kanapathi	12859
Report adopted	12859

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private
Bills**

Mr. Logan Kanapathi	12859
Report adopted	12859

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private
Bills**

Mr. Logan Kanapathi	12859
Report adopted	12859

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI****Shuang Ying Company Ltd. Act, 2021, Bill Pr46,
Mr. Stan Cho / Projet de loi Pr46, M. Stan Cho**

First reading agreed to	12859
-------------------------------	-------

**STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES / DÉCLARATIONS
MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES****Nuclear energy**

Hon. Paul Calandra	12859
--------------------------	-------

MOTIONS**House sittings**

Hon. Paul Calandra	12860
Motion agreed to	12860

House sittings

Hon. Paul Calandra	12860
Motion agreed to	12860

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS**Optometry services**

Ms. Peggy Sattler	12861
-------------------------	-------

Optometry services

Mr. Michael Mantha	12861
--------------------------	-------

OPPOSITION DAY / JOUR DE L'OPPOSITION**COVID-19 response**

Ms. Andrea Horwath	12861
Ms. Jane McKenna	12864
Ms. Sara Singh	12866
Mr. Mike Schreiner	12867
Mr. Joel Harden	12868
Mr. John Fraser	12869
Mr. Percy Hatfield	12869
Ms. Marit Stiles	12870
Ms. Sandy Shaw	12870
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	12871
Ms. Jennifer K. French	12872
Mr. Michael Mantha	12873
Ms. Peggy Sattler	12873
Ms. Andrea Horwath	12874
Motion negatived	12875

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS /
AFFAIRES D'INTÉRÊT PUBLIC ÉMANANT
DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS****Greenbelt**

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos	12875
Ms. Sandy Shaw	12877
Mr. Mike Schreiner	12877
Mr. Lorne Coe	12878
Mr. Jeff Burch	12878
Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios	12878
Mr. Robert Bailey	12879
Mr. Joel Harden	12879
Mr. Kaleed Rasheed	12880
Ms. Jennifer K. French	12880
Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos	12881
Motion agreed to	12881

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 21 April 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 21 avril 2021

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING THE PEOPLE
OF ONTARIO ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2021

LOI DE 2021 VISANT À PROTÉGER
LA POPULATION ONTARIENNE
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 20, 2021, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 269, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 269, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning. It's really an honour to speak here today on behalf of my constituents.

Mr. Speaker, budgets are about priorities, and surely, given the state of emergency our province has been plunged into, there can be no greater priority for any government than protecting the health and well-being of Ontarians.

I really welcome the opportunity this morning to debate this Conservative government's priorities as outlined in the provincial budget and in this implementation bill, and to examine whether or not they match the priorities of the people I represent, the constituents of Davenport.

Toronto, along with our neighbours in Peel, have had to bear the brunt of this pandemic, but I know that none of the Ontario regions or municipalities have been spared. This week, we're seeing all too clearly the devastating consequences of a government that has failed in its responsibility to protect and support people. We have a Premier who many people in this province are demanding to resign.

The budget that we are looking at, the implementation bill that implements some aspects of the budget, mirrors this government's overall pandemic response. And let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, it fails. It fails utterly to offer the help that is so desperately needed. It fails to also offer the hope that a just recovery that recognizes the disproportionate impact of this pandemic on racialized and working-class Ontarians would bring, on women, on young people.

It fails insofar as instead of reflecting the urgency of this crisis, this budget is presented as if the pandemic is over. It shows a government that's simply falling back on the same failed policies it was putting forward before the pandemic—more cuts and a narrow view of what government can do beyond satisfying the interests of the very wealthy and the very well connected. Let me tell you, people deserve better. My constituents deserve better.

Mr. Speaker, I want to start by talking about some of the key issues that the people in my community and across the province are facing right now, and how this budget that this bill implements could have offered them some hope.

Let's start with housing. Before the pandemic began, my community, Davenport, was facing an epidemic of evictions. Ever-increasing rents coupled with diminished tenant protections and loopholes in the law have led to more people being forced out of their homes. And then the pandemic hit. While we've seen these on-again, off-again eviction enforcement moratoriums, people in Davenport are facing fast-tracked hearings over Zoom.

Let's be really clear: A stay-at-home order means nothing if you're forced out of that home. So it's no surprise, in my community, that we've seen a corresponding increase in people forced to make camp in parks, transitways, wherever they can find a safe place.

This budget offers nothing—nada, nothing—to address this crisis. It re-announces some one-time emergency COVID-19-related funding for municipalities, including millions for the social services relief fund spread out among all the municipalities in Ontario. It doesn't include a real eviction ban that would protect people until a full year, say, after the pandemic is over, like we proposed. It doesn't adopt the other measures the NDP opposition has put forward, like the rent relief program put forward by the member for Beaches–East York or the affordable housing strategy moved by the member for Spadina–Fort York. These are NDP ideas, but we would be more than happy for this government to steal them. In fact, we encourage it: Steal from us. We just need to keep people housed right now.

Meanwhile, in the city of Toronto, we've been left hanging until the last possible moment to confirm operating funding for 1,100 supportive housing units. The province is responsible for the funding needed to operate these affordable apartments and to provide the on-site wraparound services required by residents. This funding needs to be stable, it needs to be permanent, or more people in my community are going to be left to fend for themselves in encampments, couch-surfing, or moving from shelter to shelter trying to find a place to avoid infection.

This government's priorities to support affordable housing in Toronto seem to be focused on dangling the possibility of future housing as a cover for bulldozing heritage properties.

Another issue that weighs heavily on the minds of my constituents in Davenport is, like for so many across this province—now, but always—health care. That's no surprise, because it has always been a significant concern—and certainly now more than ever. And what are the government's priorities when it comes to health care, as represented in this implementation bill? Well, what greater responsibility could there be, during a global pandemic than ensuring our health care system has the resources it needs to save lives? We know that the hallway health care crisis reached record levels under the Liberal government and that major steps were needed to end it. I think we all agree to that. But this government has had over two years to correct that, and the progress has been nowhere near what it should have been.

The budget's base funding increase is \$82 million short of what the Ontario Hospital Association said they needed before the pandemic. The \$300 million committed to address the surgical backlog is just marginally higher than what was announced in the fall economic update, despite the fact that even more surgeries are being delayed now in this deadly third wave. New Democrats have called for Ontario to match British Columbia's investment, which, scaled to Ontario, would have been a total of \$725 million invested. We are \$425 million short of that. It's a lot of numbers, I know.

Here's a real-life example of what happens when you underfund hospitals: We end up with overflowing ICUs. In the middle of a mental health and addiction crisis, we lose programs that I have raised in this House on a number of occasions and with the Minister of Health—and have yet to receive a letter responding to it, even a response. We lose programs like the Portuguese- and Spanish-language community mental health programs at the University Health Network, because hospitals decide they have other priorities. Those programs, which are so essential in our communities—imagine not being able to receive the important mental health services that you need in a crisis, in a language other than your own without interpretation available. It's absurd. It is really another example of how this government is failing communities in this province.

Let's look also at long-term care: 3,755 residents have lost their lives since April 2020—grandparents, parents, friends, neighbours, elders gone, and with them, many staff, people who dedicated their working life to helping our seniors. We have failed them. There was no iron ring as the death toll kept rising. No one from this government came riding in to the rescue. The minister responsible took no responsibility, and Ontarians had to watch as she stood in this place and blamed everyone else for what was happening.

0910

Fairview Nursing Home in my riding experienced multiple outbreaks. It's a small home, actually. Fourteen people lost their lives in those outbreaks, which was a

significant percentage of the residents there. Many more got very, very sick and, I have to say, their lives may be shorter as a result of that. Staff were ill.

I think we can all agree that we owe it to those who lost their lives to ensure it never happens again and that there is some accountability.

So what does this budget do? Does it take steps to finally get the profit out of long-term care, given that the majority of the deaths were in for-profit homes? Does it attempt to address the issue of the needs of shareholders taking precedence over the lives of residents? No, it doesn't.

There is no commitment to wage increases for PSWs beyond June 30, 2021. There is no commitment to reinstate comprehensive resident quality inspections in long-term care. There is a commitment to build more beds, which we know are needed, and I hope that the government will fast-track not only the building of them but also the staffing of those beds.

I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, last week I met again with Magellan Community Charities, which is a non-profit organization working to build the first long-term-care home specifically for the Portuguese Canadian community, who make up almost a quarter of the population of my riding of Davenport. This would be the first facility of its kind in the province. They are still fundraising for capital in order to qualify for provincial support. The grants are retroactive, so they're not going to see the money until the facility is under construction. Why not use this moment, when the failures of our long-term-care system have become so apparent, to invest up front and get this project built sooner? Those seniors helped build our local economy, and they shouldn't have to wait for culturally appropriate care in their own community. I stand ready to work with the government to make this happen. Will you work with me?

The budget does commit funding for the vaccine roll-out, and I think I speak for all our constituents when I say that I hope it gets put to good use, and fast. Davenport includes four hot spot postal codes where people are at a greater risk of contracting COVID-19. We have one of the largest populations of workers in the construction industry in the province. We have many people who have limited English. We have a large population of workers who are out of status. These factors have added to the risk. It has been over a week since eligibility was extended to everyone over 18 in those postal codes, and yet every single day in my office we are deluged with calls from people who cannot get a vaccine. The mobile and pop-up clinics are limited. Information is hard to come by. People are depending on Twitter accounts to find out where to get vaccinated.

And those essential workers in the construction industry and in food processing who live in my riding are still waiting for paid sick days from this government. This government budget gave them nothing like that. Virtually every single medical expert, the government's own science table, business organizations and labour organizations have all said that paid sick days would be one of the

most effective ways of getting this wave under control, protecting workers' lives and preventing new infections. And yet this government has resisted it every step of the way.

Mr. Chris Glover: Shame.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Shame on you.

We have a bill ready to be passed right now. We've moved unanimous consent countless times day after day, and this Premier has refused to do it. This budget is an opportunity to make that happen. Why not give themselves a win? After the province-wide revolt we're seeing right now, why not do the right thing for once?

Speaker, you won't be surprised that I want to move on and speak a little bit about education. In my role as critic, it's an area I get to spend a lot of time on. I have the great privilege of speaking with teachers and with education workers every week, from all corners of this province. I talk to principals, to trustees, and of course, I really do make time to speak to students themselves, because their voice matters.

It's been a really hard year; there is no denying that. I know we can all agree. A failure to invest in smaller class sizes, in better ventilation, in a robust in-school asymptomatic testing regime has led to closure after closure. It has brought us to this place. We warned this government, but it has brought us to this place—disruptions that have forced our kids back into remote learning and away from their peers and their supports that they need in school.

Perhaps more than any other section of the budget, the education section truly feels like this government thinks the pandemic is over and that there won't be any issues to deal with after the fact. And maybe that's no surprise, because less than 24 hours before the Premier shut down Ontario and Ontario schools, the Minister of Education was writing every parent in this province and saying, "Everything is just cool; it's just fine. Nothing to see here; schools are opening as planned." What went wrong? How is that even possible? It speaks to deep mismanagement and incompetence.

In this budget, it is clear that COVID-19 supports are being wound down. There is no commitment to reimburse school boards for the depleting, in their words, of \$500 million in reserves, which leaves all of our school boards in a precarious financial position for the year ahead. This is not a position they should be put in, and there is still no plan to reopen schools safely. I don't know if the Minister of Education simply had no influence over this budget or if he simply doesn't believe that our schools are worth investing in.

We are seeing an entire generation of Ontarians who are going to face setbacks in learning, in future income, in mental health and well-being because of the disruptions and the weak supports offered to them this year. This budget could have charted a way forward. It could have been putting children and youth at the centre of our economic recovery. It could have offered hope. It failed.

School repair funding is exactly the same this year as last year, while the school repair backlog hasn't changed. By giving that exact same, status quo support year after

year, we're never going to get near to touching that \$16-billion backlog that was left behind by the Liberals and then grew under the Conservatives. Surely this pandemic has shown the need for schools that are well-ventilated and safe, with taps that work. I don't know, call me crazy—touchless faucets in our schools. We have them here at the Legislature; they were put in during this pandemic. Why can't our kids get the same? And HVAC systems that actually work. I've got to tell you, Mr. Speaker, this is the part that I really don't understand. I think that we all put our children first. We believe in our children, and we want to see them helped, and we know how hard it is. There is not a person in this room who doesn't know how hard this has hit children and youth, and it really is outstanding that this government has not addressed that at all in this budget.

Furthermore, I will add that they have not included any acknowledgement here of what the learning needs are going to be next year. We'll have seen almost two years of learning disruption. Our education workers are doing everything they can with no support from this government—not one day of actual provincial professional development. Unfortunately, this government isn't doing anything. It has no plan to continue to provide any kind of support.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Shameful.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes.

This budget also included—I'm moving on to small businesses here, Mr. Speaker—a doubling of the problem-plagued Ontario Small Business Support Grant. I know that's welcome news for businesses in my riding that were actually eligible for the grant, but for those that weren't, this budget does nothing for them.

Small businesses have been so patient with this government, after they've been subjected to lockdown after lockdown. They have written to my office begging that this be the last one. The two-week period when restrictions were relaxed, just as the science table was warning of variants, actually hurt a lot of the small businesses in my community because they staffed up, they bought supplies, they reopened patios—and then they had to shut down again.

I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, restaurants and cafes in my riding, when I was going around just as they were opening up again, said to me, "Please tell the government not to do this. This is going to hurt us in the end. It's not time yet." They were begging.

My own constituency staff have been overwhelmed with small business owners desperate for answers and information. This second tranche of funding is supposed to be released this week, but I have businesses still waiting for the first payment; it's outrageous.

The budget could have offered real rent relief for those businesses, and other direct supports. Instead, shops are empty, "For Lease" signs are covering our main streets.

We're facing the biggest crisis we have ever faced. People are counting on us. They deserved a budget that would give them help and hope. This is not it. It's reflective of a government that is absolutely out of step with the needs of Ontarians.

0920

Last night, in Toronto alone, 1,000 people joined—sorry, this was two nights ago now—an organizing meeting on Zoom with Toronto MPPs; 6,700 more watched live. Do you know what the focus of the meeting was, Mr. Speaker? The focus of the meeting was: “How do we fight this pandemic, how do we protect one another, and how do we defeat this government?”—because they are hopping mad.

While we work to bring their voices into this place, as we do every week, I want to challenge the members opposite to do some listening of their own. I understand that the Premier planned to do a \$1,000-a-ticket fundraiser this weekend but they put that off. Well, thank goodness. It is time to listen to ordinary working people in this province. They are struggling in this pandemic. The construction workers in my community, their partners, wives, are calling my office in tears asking why they have to go to work and put their lives at risk. They are sick, and they are in hospital. Your donors have had enough of your attention. The results are clear in our ICUs right now. It is time to start listening and start acting or get out of the way.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I listened with intent to the opposition member’s talk about schools and classrooms and the need to get smaller classes. I might remind her that our Minister of Education did a lot of work on that line.

They tried, first of all, to deal with the teachers’ unions—to allow retired teachers to come back without penalty. It took over three months of that negotiation until the teachers’ unions—I won’t say “the teachers,” because I have teachers in the family, and they were astounded by this fact—finally agreed to let them work 90 days or 105 days, not even enough to get through the year. And then they had to go back, because they couldn’t get enough teachers. If you even thought of graduating, you had a job this year. Then they went back and allowed second-year students to come back. If that’s the co-operation you get from schools, what else would you expect them to do? Where were you going to get these—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Back to the member from Davenport for a response.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you for the question. I have to say, this is a great example of why the people in this province are so unhappy right now.

You are in government.

These are government MPPs asking that question. They have the power. They could have agreed to what the district school boards were asking for, which is smaller class sizes, instead of eradicating that and forcing them to go back to status quo. They refuse to take responsibility over and over and over again. They’re blaming teachers now. They’re blaming the education workers on the front line who have worked so hard to educate our children. That is shameful. That’s all I’ve got to say to that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Jeff Burch: I want to thank my friend from Davenport, first of all, for doing such a fantastic job as our education critic through all of this.

She raised the issue of school boards being forced by this budget to have to dip into reserves. It reminded me of when I was a city councillor and the budget chair. We were always dealing with some conservative who wanted to dip into reserves to bring in an artificially low tax increase, and we’d have to have this argument about sustainability.

What are the problems with forcing a school board to dip into reserves, and what does that say to sustainability for the future?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you so much to the member from Niagara Centre for that question. The member from Niagara Centre brings so much experience from the municipal side into this House, and we really appreciate it.

As a former school board trustee myself, I can tell you that those reserves—this government treats it like it’s money that’s just sitting there waiting to be spent. This is money that has already been allocated. This will absolutely, without question, force school boards to make cuts. Where are those cuts going to come out of? There’s no way those cuts won’t impact our children. They’re going to come out of classrooms, and then this government is going to turn around—I guarantee it—like they just did, and blame the school boards. That’s what’s going to happen—\$500 million, half a billion dollars, taken out of school board reserves. That is going to come out of our children’s classrooms just at the time when they need additional supports, which is what those boards would have used that money for. This government once again is going to rob from our school boards.

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

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thanks to the member for your comments today.

I know you touched on the Ontario Small Business Support Grant and the second round of supports coming and how that has affected some businesses in your riding—as I’ve heard from businesses in my riding, as well. Approximately 120,000 small businesses are automatically going to receive \$1.7 billion in relief from the second round.

Also, budget 2021 provides an additional \$10 million invested in the Digital Main Street program. I had the opportunity to meet with the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction and with the BIA from his area and heard from businesses that took part in that and actually saw an increase in—one lady gave us an example of 180% in her business, just taking it online. These were businesses that had no online presence before. Can the member comment on what she has heard on that?

How could you not support budget 2021 and the opportunities it will bring for small businesses in your riding?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you for your question.

Actually, as it happens, just yesterday I sent another letter to the minister responsible to explain some of the issues that we’re finding, the themes. We are working every day—my staff—with the minister’s office staff to try to resolve some of these issues, but they keep re-appearing.

I'll give you a good example, something that just recently came up. We have a lot of people in our community who are what I would call makers, creators. They are people who produce goods that they then sell in markets, at the One of a Kind show, things like that. They're entrepreneurs. They have been shut out from these grants. We're going to work hard to try to see if we can resolve that. I would welcome the opportunity to work with the government to try to solve that problem, because there are thousands of them who are completely shut out because they don't actually have a shop. This is an example of one of the issues, and I would welcome the opportunity to continue to work with the government to solve that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: This government has made somewhat of a gesture for increasing wages for front-line long-term-care workers, and it's temporary.

Just recently in PressProgress, there was an article about how the corporate directors at Chartwell, one of the largest for-profit companies, are voting to give their executives millions in bonuses, and they recommended voting against a living wage for the hard-hit front-line workers. This is a long-term-care provider that has had at least 100 regulatory infractions. They have the highest resident death rates of any provider, and they have class action lawsuits.

So I wondered, why is it that the government has failed in the budget to permanently give front-line heroes the permanent wage increase they deserve? And can you also speak about—you mentioned not-for-profits—why the government is so stuck on not taking profits out of long-term care, such as this example?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you to the member from London-Fanshawe for that excellent question.

It speaks to priorities. We know that. It speaks to priorities in terms of their focus on for-profits—because these are the very companies that are their donors, that are their former leaders, for example, sitting on some of these boards. There are definitely connections there. It's very unfortunate that expert after expert after expert has said we must remove the profit from patient care and this government has refused again—and the Liberals before them did, as well, let's just note.

I've read that PressProgress piece, as well; that research was excellent.

I want to give you another example of how I think this government is failing. In the Fairview Nursing Home in my riding, just like in long-term-care facilities across the province, they replaced some of the part-time staff who were working in the facility as screeners with security guards. I'd like to know why and how they got those contracts, first of all. But I'll tell you that that meant that more and more of the women—largely, racialized women—who work in those facilities have less work now.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Stan Cho: The NDP is consistent. For three weeks now, I haven't heard one fact, one figure, one page

number, one graph—nothing referenced from actually within the budget.

The NDP had an opportunity to give their ideas—I heard lots of new ideas for the budget, but why in finance committee, then, did they not offer one amendment? The independent members offered five.

One of the NDP members yesterday admitted that in committee last year, we were able to work together to get an amendment through, to change. It's an example of the system working, when we join forces to fight COVID-19 instead of just fighting the government.

0930

Speaker, my question to the NDP is very simple: Why no amendments for this budget if they have so many ideas?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Mr. Speaker, this is another example, once again, of the member opposite—and thank you for your question, I guess. This is what the people of this province are seeing every day now and are furious about: this government making excuses, trying to blame everybody else for their failures.

Why would we bring forward amendments that this government is just going to defeat? They've defeated every single one.

We laid it out for them. Organization after organization—front-line workers—said, “We need this. We need increased pay. We need paid sick days.” This government ignored them.

Don't make it about the opposition. Don't make it about the people of Ontario. Take some responsibility.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Unfortunately, there isn't enough time to continue with questions and responses.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): However, I do have an announcement to make, and that is: I 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. Phillips assumes ballot item number 77 and Ms. Fee assumes ballot item number 83.

PROTECTING THE PEOPLE OF ONTARIO ACT

(BUDGET MEASURES), 2021

LOI DE 2021 VISANT À PROTÉGER

LA POPULATION ONTARIENNE

(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Mr. Speaker, good morning. I'm quite happy to stand up and speak today on the government's third budget.

One might be inclined to think the government's recent budget might have been copied from a prior government—like the NDP or the Liberal, even. Of course, it's not,

because unlike those budgets, this PC government is spending far more than other governments in the entire history of our province—that's excluding spending relief related to COVID-19—and has absolutely no path to balance.

Let the record show some of the headlines that this government's budget has received—and, I might add, from some sources that are quite friendly to the government and happy to routinely give apology coverage. From the Canadian Press: "Ontario's Long Path to Balance Is a Problem: Experts." Matt Gurney: "Doug Ford Is No Longer a Budget Hawk. So What Is He Now?" The National Post editorial board: "Ontario Budget Spends Too Liberally and Has No Clear Path to Balance." Randall Denley, writing in the National Post: "Upcoming Ontario Budget is Bound to Agitate Both PC Supporters and the Public Sector"—quite the accomplishment there, I must say. Randall Denley in the National Post again: "Ontario's 2021 Budget Filled with Red Ink, Tired Ideas, and No Plan to Restore Reality." Yikes. CBC's Mike Crawley: "Post-Pandemic Red Ink Is the Most Startling Thing About the Doug Ford Government's New Budget." In the Sun: "Ontario Budget 2021: More Per-Child Cash but Decade of Red Ink Looms." The Fraser Institute: "Ontario's Latest Budget Will Keep Debt Interest Costs Rising." Lorrie Goldstein in the Sun: "Ford Government on Verge of a Debt Crisis, Says Report." Also Goldstein in the Sun: "Ford's Budget Channels Wynne, McGuinty and Trudeau." Oof. And finally, again, the Fraser Institute: "Ford Fiscal Strategy Resembles McGuinty/Wynne Plans—with Predictable Results"—quite the accomplishment for a Premier who spent years vilifying all three, claiming that he was different and saying in the last election campaign that his party was the only fiscally responsible option. What a joke.

It's amazing, the consistency of this government. I can practically talk about the same points on this budget as I did last November.

So now let's look at the details and revisit, to a certain degree, last November.

This year's deficit is projected to be north of \$33 billion; the last budget was north of \$30 billion. This spending is not temporary and not just due to COVID-19 measures. The PC government is planning on continuing their record spending, and they, again, provide no plan to get back to a balanced budget, stating simply that it will take a decade, 10 years.

I remind the House that a track to balance was a specific promise made by this government in its campaign in 2018, and they have broken that promise, COVID-19 or not.

I remind you again, as I said in November, that prior to COVID-19, this PC government was spending more on an annual basis than the prior government and publicly disclosed that they were not planning on getting back to balance in their four-year mandate—another promise broken.

This government needs a plan to get businesses back up and running as soon as possible. They've been forced to close their doors three times over the last year. They need

a plan to reduce these historically high spending levels. They need to do so within their four-year mandate, not 10 years from now. They need to provide a plan that would boost Ontario's economic growth post-coronavirus. They can't go back to historically low levels of economic growth and exit the recession in this manner.

This Premier claims on social media that after COVID-19, the government is going to unleash unprecedented power—unprecedented growth, pardon me; they've already shown unprecedented power with Bill 195, but I digress—and yet the budget shows a measly 2% growth even after COVID-19. That's not a plan for a stronger economy or strong economic growth; that is a plan to reach the status quo, from the government that said it would ensure Ontario was open for business—whatever that means, because do you know what? Ontario is, in fact, not open for business. We are closed for business. We have no plan to reopen and no plan to grow the economy after COVID-19, and that is a shame.

These levels of spending, where we are projected to be spending over \$10 billion on an annual basis just to manage our debt, will impact our province's ability to continue providing services in education and in health care. As our deficit stays historically high and as our debt load grows, there will come a time when we can't even afford to maintain what we currently have for health care and what we currently have for education, never mind even making them any better. We're going to see increased class sizes. Health care times will not decrease; in fact, they'll increase. People will have to turn to other options, simply because this province, Ontario, will simply not have any money left to maintain the public services that the taxpayers pay so much for. We will not be able to improve them.

In addition, I'd like to point out that now, three years into this government's mandate, after promising to put money back in people's pockets, this budget, much like the last budget, provides no personal tax relief—none. In fact, this government has done a tax increase in its three years that is now permanent as a result of its terrible performance at the Ontario courts and the Supreme Court of Canada, where it threw the carbon tax challenge against the Justin Trudeau Liberal government by conceding two out of the three legal arguments in that case and all the facts. And this government knew it was losing; of course they did. They didn't even try to win. That is why they introduced an industrial carbon tax and got it blessed and approved by the federal Liberal government, which provides this provincial government with increased revenues—so, in essence, a tax increase. For industry, it's a carbon tax; for small business and individuals, there's no broad-based tax relief after three years of a supposed Conservative government—again, from the government that claimed it would put money back in the pockets of Ontarians.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk a bit about electricity. This government had complete power and authority to cancel the wind turbine project in North Stormont. They didn't have to pay any fees, and they used incorrect examples to justify continuing this project. As has been written by Professor

Bruce Parry of Queen's University, it requires a bill—not a cabinet order or a ministerial order that results in lawsuits, but a bill in this Legislature, in this House—to cancel and decommission wind turbine projects like the one in North Stormont and any others that we don't need; a bill, as in legislation that decommissions and sets the compensation, if any. That is because this Legislature has parliamentary supremacy, and past governments cannot bind future governments.

When it comes to taking such actions, I'm sure that the government and its fancy apologists in the media will scoff and say it's unrealistic. The Minister of Health will say, as she has in the past, that it will drive investment away and turn Ontario into a banana republic. Yet this government has no problem using that same parliamentary authority to impose more than a year of emergency measures that led to 25,000 businesses shuttering their doors and closing down, putting people out of work; causing harm to people's mental health that they justify in the name of pretending to stop the spread of COVID-19, which they've failed to do, as we see by our new numbers growing every day. Yet to fight and reverse energy poverty and to grow our economy by reducing electricity rates, by decommissioning expensive wind turbine projects that produce surplus energy that we are dumping into other jurisdictions for pennies on the dollar, this government pretends they cannot figure out what to do. They pretend that they don't have the power. It's an absolute shame.

0940

In conclusion, as I've said, the people of Ontario wanted a government, voted for a government, gave this government a mandate, to implement fiscally responsible budgets. We've had three, none of which have been fiscally responsible. They wanted a government to get electricity rates down, to provide personal tax relief, to get Ontario's fiscal house in order and, most importantly, to grow our economy. Instead, after three long years, they got a government that is spending heavier than the Liberals and any other government in the history of this great province.

No wonder people don't trust this government. No wonder people don't trust governments. They don't trust decision-makers, and they question what is going on. And that is a most terrible shame.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: It's always a pleasure to rise here in the Legislature—especially on this snowy Wednesday morning across Ontario.

It was good to hear the member from Cambridge talk a little bit about the budget and some of the different things that it contains. She was highlighting earlier on in her remarks many of the articles that were printed in the paper and other media over the last little while. She seemed disappointed that the government was spending money on things that, in my mind and to the people I talk to in Waterloo region, are very important at this time, such as health care and education.

So my question to her would be, if she didn't want us to spend as much money as we're spending, where would she want that money taken away from?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member for Kitchener–Conestoga.

I really enjoy this budget topic, this debate. Over the last few days, and even with this question, we're seeing a Progressive Conservative government asking to spend more: "We're using the NDP measures. We've implemented them. We're Conservative. Look at us. We're spending more. We're just spending."

We promised—and I'm saying "we" because I was a Progressive Conservative back in 2018, when I believed all the promises. I was saying, "Yes, let's make this province better. Let's reduce spending. Let's have better transparency and accountability." We got none of that. We got more spending than the Liberals.

You want to spend like a drunken sailor, my friends in the PC caucus? Let's get some transparency around that money. Let's see some better improvements in our health care system. You waited three years to put money into health care—three years.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Jeff Burch: It's always good to hear from my friend from Cambridge.

I've known a lot of conservatives in my time, especially in municipal politics. Conservative beliefs can cross party lines. There are issues like, for example, conservation—many conservatives believe in conservation—economic sustainability and those kinds of principles.

This budget, it seems to me, goes away from many of those principles. Actually, it is a budget that, like many of the measures in the last couple of years we've seen, rewards the friends of the Conservative Party rather than actually sticking to the principles.

Is that the way you see this budget?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member from Niagara Centre. There's a lot in there.

Yes, a lot of things do cross party lines. You'll see that there are some things that, across the board—regardless of whether you're voting orange, red, green, blue or yellow—people feel very strongly about. Excessive spending may not be one of those things, especially when not done correctly; especially when there's no justification; especially when the COVID-19 pandemic is being used as an excuse, when I have highlighted that, in fact, the spending was higher even before COVID-19 hit.

You talk about what is happening in terms of lobbying or things like that. I would also suggest that polling has something to do with it. A lot of decisions are being made on polling. There's no real policy that the other side believes in—it's kind of where the wind blows. Unfortunately, we're seeing a lot of that in the budget.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you to the member from Cambridge. I understand where she's coming from in her remarks.

It is certainly important to look at debt and deficits. They matter; there's no question about that. But as I've said in this House before, when the health of the people

we serve is at risk, there's no dollar figure you can put on that, and now is absolutely the time to spend. I defend the Premier and this government in every way in putting no dollar figure on protecting the lives and livelihoods of the people we serve.

My question to the member is, will you be supporting this budget—because there are other measures in talking about the other side of the ledger. It's not just about expenses; it's also about revenue, it's about digitization, it's about a modernization of procurement and other government services. It's also looking at non-tax revenue—things like iGaming, which operates in a grey market. Those revenues go offshore, but perhaps, worst of all, they don't lead to health for those with a gambling problem in this province. Will the member support the non-tax revenue generation ideas, the modernization initiatives to increase the revenue side of this ledger until we're through this pandemic?

We believe in betting on the people of this province, and we're confident we can get our fiscal books in order.

This government is the only government in Canada that has been transparent with the people we serve during the entire process of the pandemic.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member for Willowdale and parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance.

No, I'm not supporting the budget, and I said that yesterday, simply because of the fact that it is not a conservative budget.

Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight something here. Every answer that the PCs give as of late has been, "We've got to save lives. We've got to spend the money." That is not an answer. Do you know why? Because that's just an easy way to make everyone sound like they're a bad guy, someone heartless who wants people to die—no.

What should have happened? Two weeks to flatten the curve back in March—great. We knew nothing about COVID-19. Fine. "Everyone is okay. Let's hunker down." We're learning more. It has been a year. We know who this virus affects. And yet, businesses are being shut down. We are decreasing our tax base and increasing our spending. In what world does this make sense? Where should the money have gone? Long-term care, health care. Who are the people most affected? That's where the money should have gone.

Why am I saying this? I don't even know why I talk about these things in the House. They didn't listen to me when I was on their side; they're probably not going to listen to me on this side. Maybe I should do a poll. Maybe that will help.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you to the member from Cambridge for her presentation.

As a First Nations person and as an MPP from far northern Ontario, I spoke about some of the issues related to access to clean drinking water. I have 13 First Nation communities that have long-term boil-water advisories. Would this be allowed in Dufferin—Caledon? Would this

be allowed in Chatham-Kent—Leamington? Would this be allowed in Cambridge?

What do you think is the issue here? Why will they not invest in access to clean drinking water, which is a basic human right?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member from Kiiwetinoong. I always enjoy hearing you speak in the House.

The matter you bring up is extremely serious. It's extremely sad. When you spoke yesterday, I listened intently. To know that there are people who have had 27 years with a long-term water advisory—that's decades of governments that have failed the people in that riding, and it's a shame. There really should be money in the budget to help with this situation.

I know that you are advocating for the people in your community. I know there are others advocating for that. My hope is that eventually your cries will fall on ears that are actually open.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure to rise today and place a question to the member from Cambridge.

I was listening to your responses and your remarks, and you mentioned that you'd put money into long-term health care and health care in general.

In the Ontario 2021 budget, our government is taking steps to protect people from this deadly virus and other issues by increasing health investments by \$16.3 billion.

Would the member opposite be supporting that unprecedented investment in public health?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member for Sarnia—Lambton.

I'll tell you what I do support: the fact that you've passed more private member's bills in this House than, I think, anybody. So congratulations once again on that, because it's quite impressive. I can't get even one passed in this place—but that's a story for another day.

As I mentioned, I will not be supporting the budget.

There have been three years of excessive spending. There had been three years—or a lack of transparency. Things could have been done much better.

As I said in my remarks back on November 18 of last year, 2020, when we had the last budget released—I had made suggestions that are similar to today's because the budgets are also similar. Those suggestions were not taken into account.

So again, no, I will not be supporting the budget.

0950

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: I heard the House leader indicate that there were some shortfalls on paid sick days. I heard the Minister of Health also say yesterday that there were gaps. I also heard the Minister of Labour indicating that there were gaps and that they were looking at addressing them.

We know where the pandemic is being spread is in the workplaces. Individuals need to stay at home when they are sick.

Does the member support the call that we've been putting forward for paid sick days?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member from Algoma–Manitoulin. I like this question because no one has asked me this question yet.

I support temporary implementation of paid sick days only if it doesn't come back to the business owner to have to pay for them. That is what I support. So, short answer, yes, I do support paid sick days.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Good morning, Speaker. I'm pleased to join the third reading debate on the budget bill. It's a budget that's continuing to invest in the future, in the programs and services Ontarians rely on today and that will be there for them in our post-pandemic world.

With Bill 269—protecting people's health and our economy—we also provided transparency to the people of Ontario, showing them, even in this time of great economic uncertainty, exactly how the government is spending taxpayers' dollars responsibly to combat the virus. It's what Ontarians expect, and it's certainly what Ontarians deserve.

Today, I want to focus my remarks on the unprecedented supports the government is providing to hard-working families and the job creators in our province, the small businesses of Ontario. We recognize that just as we must make sure that people are healthy, we also must safeguard our economy. That's why protecting jobs and preparing for Ontario's economic recovery is a crucial second pillar in our plan, alongside our unwavering commitment to protect people's health.

Residents and employers have gone far above and beyond the call to protect each other from COVID-19.

While no one could have predicted or prevented this global pandemic, Ontario residents understand that their personal actions can lower the risk of transmission and help protect their families and communities, like the town of Whitby and the region of Durham.

Speaker, I've seen first-hand in Whitby the sacrifices people have made to keep their neighbours safe, sacrifices they've made even when it impacted their own livelihoods. While these sacrifices have come at a cost—this government will continue to be there to support people, to support jobs, until we can put this difficult period behind us.

Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy brings the government's total investment to protect Ontario's economy to \$23 billion in direct supports. Through the 2021 budget, we're taking further steps to support many hard-working families in Whitby and the region of Durham—the many families, workers and employers who have given so much of themselves to help their community withstand the pandemic.

The measures proposed in Bill 269 represent significant steps forward in our plan to protect the economy—not only to get through COVID-19, but to emerge on the other side even stronger. That's an important distinction: to emerge on the other side even stronger.

This legislation proposes three changes to the Taxation Act, 2007, that will bring direct relief to people and businesses. That's in direct response to the level of collaboration and the consultation led by our finance minister and parliamentary assistant—to listen carefully across the province to what people's real needs are in the province of Ontario. I thank them for that.

To provide additional support to parents for child care expenses, the government is proposing a 20% top-up to the Ontario Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses tax credit, or CARE tax credit, for 2021. The government introduced this tax credit in 2019 to help Ontario families with child care costs while letting them choose the care that is right for their children. When you speak about choosing the care that's right for their children, again, it's absolutely illustrative of the level of consultation that took place across the province, listening carefully to all sectors of the province—in particular, families. I know when I speak to my daughter, Melissa, who lives in the community of Bowmanville—it's constructed of a lot of young families—this particular aspect is certainly making a difference and will continue to make a difference in their lives. The top-up proposed in Bill 269 would increase support for parents from \$1,250 to \$1,500, on average. Total support provided by this temporary top-up would be about \$75 million to more than 300,000 families in Ontario. If passed, it will help make child care more affordable for those families struggling to make ends meet during this very trying time, and during a time when child care has become even more important and even more of a challenge for working parents.

Speaker, I know that you're a new grandfather. Congratulations on that—I know it's hard to believe, but that is the case. Notwithstanding that, you know what a difference what I'm speaking about is making in your family group as well, going forward.

This support will also help parents get back into the workforce. This is another aspect of what we heard in the consultations that took place across the province.

The parliamentary assistant participated in a number of virtual consultations that I hosted in Whitby—whether it be with the Whitby Chamber of Commerce or whether it be with other sectors across the community. They included people from across all of the region, not only Whitby. Not unlike other communities, we're developing an economic recovery plan. The time that the parliamentary assistant took to listen carefully to the people in that round table not only informed the budget, but it also informed the construct of the economic recovery plans for the region of Durham—an important distinction going forward, and it's a segue into what I want to discuss next.

Many of the sectors that have suffered heavy job losses and are experiencing a slower recovery are female-dominated. Our government fully recognizes, as we should, that supporting increased participation by women in the workforce will be critical to Ontario's economic recovery. In the riding that I have the privilege of representing, we have a number of women entrepreneurs leading successful small businesses. We know that a key

factor in enabling the participation of women is having access to affordable child care.

Along with access to affordable child care, people should have access to the training and development that will help them to succeed. You've often heard me speak here in the Legislature and say that no one succeeds alone. We're at a time in the history of this province when people need a hand up.

1000

This government has listened carefully. This budget demonstrates how well we've listened. We know that COVID-19 has had a significant impact. Everyone here today and those who are watching know that it has had a significant impact on Ontario's labour market, and some of its impacts may be long-lasting. Many workers lost their jobs and are still unemployed. This is why Ontario is providing a range of training and employment supports to ensure workers have the skills required to support economic recovery—and that's the economic recovery that I spoke of, particularly, in the region of Durham. This is a key plank in the region of Durham's economic recovery plan.

Bill 269 aims to help people connect to jobs by proposing the Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit. This would be a temporary refundable personal income tax credit that would ease the burdens on people looking to shift careers, retrain or sharpen their skills. The Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit would provide an estimated \$260 million in support to about 230,000 people in 2021, many of whom are included from the region of Durham.

In the region of Durham, you'll recall, Speaker—when you visit the region, which I hope that you do often—that we're blessed by having many educational institutions: Ontario Tech University, Trent University and Durham College.

Durham College has a significant regional training centre, a skills development centre, that aligns so well with the training tax credit I just referred to.

This credit would provide up to \$2,000 in relief for 50% of eligible expenses, including graphic design programs, heavy machinery training programs and post-secondary courses that provide credits toward a degree, diploma or certificate. It also includes personal support worker training. Those elements that I just described are based on consultation not only with those people who want to retrain but with the educational institutions that I spoke of. It's also based on the types of jobs that are available from our employer community in the region of Durham.

Without a doubt, this government is committed to training and hiring more personal support workers as part of our plan to fix our long-term-care system, after 15 years of neglect under the previous Liberal government.

The dedicated men and women who serve our seniors as personal support workers have performed heroic work across this great province during the pandemic.

Ontario is initiating the largest recruitment and training of personal support workers in our province's history, to reduce an unreasonably long wait-list and provide better care for long-term-care residents. It's our hope that people

interested in becoming personal support workers will take advantage of the proposed Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit to help with their training costs, because the people of Ontario need them more than ever.

Speaker, Ontario's prosperity is built on the strengths of its regional economies. I spoke about the economy of the region of Durham, and I spoke about its economic recovery plan. While the province as a whole experienced positive employment growth between the last recession and the outbreak of COVID-19, the pace of the regional market growth has varied. Areas in and around Toronto, like the region of Durham, experienced more rapid employment growth compared to other areas of the province.

That's why Ontario introduced the Regional Opportunities Investment Tax Credit in the March 2020 economic and fiscal update to help encourage businesses to invest in areas of the province where employment growth lagged the provincial average between 2009 and 2019. This corporate income tax measure is a 10% refundable tax credit for eligible corporations that build, renovate or purchase eligible commercial or industrial buildings in a qualifying region of the province.

This measure proposed in Bill 269 is to enhance the Regional Opportunities Investment Tax Credit by doubling the tax credit rate from 10% to 20%, a very important distinction and a very needed one. At a critical time, when many businesses are looking to reopen or transition their operations, enhancing the tax credit would provide opportunities for economic growth and job creation. That's what we want, and I know you would agree.

Positioning the province as a top-tier destination for investment and job creation is critical to supporting long-term economic growth. We know that in the global economy, however, there's increasingly fierce competition among jurisdictions to attract business investments. To help make Ontario more attractive, more competitive and to transform its approach to business attraction, the government has created Invest Ontario, an agency dedicated to attracting investors to our great province. As part of the 2021 budget, the government is committing \$400 million over four years to create the Invest Ontario Fund, which will support Invest Ontario and encourage investments in the key sectors of advanced manufacturing, technology, and life sciences. Why those three areas? Again, that's based on the level of consultation across a number of sectors, led by the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Finance. The agency will provide expertise and investment services that are responsive and customized to support investment opportunities. Services include identifying available financial assistance, talent support, advisory supports and other program assistance overall.

Small businesses that are confirmed eligible recipients of the Ontario Small Business Support Grant will automatically be entitled to a second payment in an amount equal to the first payment that they received, saving them from the red tape of another application form. These two rounds of support will deliver an estimated \$3.4 billion to approximately 120,000 small businesses in Ontario,

helping them weather this difficult time and protect jobs—protecting jobs across Ontario, but, in particular, protecting jobs in the region of Durham. You'll know, Speaker, that the region of Durham, geographically, is the largest in Ontario. In the next five to six years, we'll have close to a million people in that region, so this particular grant and the effect that it's having is significant and lasting.

The 2021 budget is investing an additional \$10 million in the Digital Main Street program in 2021-22 to help more small businesses achieve a digital transformation and serve customers more effectively online. This particular program has really been a difference-maker with business improvement associations across the province. I can give you any number of examples in the town of Whitby where this has been a significant game-changer.

1010

Speaker, our response to the pandemic has required extraordinary measures, and I don't think anyone would disagree with that. We're living in an extraordinary time.

I would like to thank Premier Ford and our cabinet for their heavy lifting through this extraordinary time.

These extraordinary measures have resulted in a growing deficit. While these deficits are neither desirable or sustainable, they are absolutely necessary right now to protect the health and safety of those we serve.

There can never be a doubt that we're committed to working hand in hand with the people of Ontario, the people we have the privilege of serving every day, to get through this pandemic, to chart a course together—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. We do have time for some questions.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: To the member: Thank you for your speech this morning.

You talked a lot about early learning and child care. I have a letter in front of me from Today's Family, which is an excellent organization in my riding. Among other things, they say, "We have provided, and continue to provide emergency child care in addition to child care throughout the pandemic as an essential service for families.

"Now more than ever, it has become clear the importance of child care as an essential service and as an economic driver..."

"We urge you to make child care educators in our community, and across the province eligible immediately for the COVID-19 vaccine."

These educators are begging you to make sure that they're safe by prioritizing their vaccine.

Also, the issue that you didn't address: There are tens of thousands of families currently on the waiting list trying to access daycare spaces.

Where in your budget is anything that will make sure these families get a space and that child care workers get the vaccinations they deserve as essential workers?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I thank the member opposite for the question.

Speaker, you will know that as part of our response, we're building 30,000 spaces, and 20,000 of those particular spaces are on the way overall.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member from Whitby for his excellent speech and for outlining the parts of the budget that are needed, certainly in Whitby.

In my riding, the hospitality and tourism grant that's being worked on as we speak and the tourism tax credit that are in the budget are really important for coming out on the other side of COVID-19. The small business grant that is being doubled is certainly very significant.

The member talked about the Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit. I know Durham College is in his riding. As we come out on the other side of COVID-19, as the economy starts to boom, how will this tax credit help?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I thank my colleague from my caucus for his question.

The effect of that particular tax credit is immense within the region of Durham. Unlike other particular sectors across the province, we have a number of workers who are retraining—but they have the platform for that retraining from Durham College. It has one of the largest retraining centres in the province of Ontario, and in varying disciplines overall. This particular tax credit for these workers who are retraining is really going to help them and their families to continue to succeed going forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): To the member from Whitby: There will be time on the clock when this bill is called back into the Legislature, and you will have an opportunity to complete the question-and-response period.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Jeff Burch: Vaccines are the light at the end of a very long tunnel, but in my community in Niagara, the vaccine rollout has been rife with confusion due to the actions of this government.

We still have no answers on the diverted shipment of 5,000 Moderna vaccines away from Niagara. I've heard from countless constituents from all age groups who were told conflicting information for the provincial booking portal and had difficulty booking their appointments.

The province earmarked selected areas for priority access to COVID-19 vaccines, but people across the province were confused when some of the areas with higher case numbers were not selected.

Niagara region's Medical Officer of Health, in an interview with TVO, stated that they were not consulted and that they did not even receive detail on how the hot spots were selected.

Ontario's own science table stated that they "did not determine the actual (postal codes) that the government would ultimately prioritize in its vaccine strategy."

Welland, a city in my riding, has the highest case count per capita in Niagara. The mayor, the CAO and the fire chief have written to the Premier, respectfully and urgently requesting additional shipments of vaccines to protect our community.

Premier, it is imperative that you review the data, listen to the science, and get vaccines into Niagara and communicate clearly so that we can get them into the arms of our citizens as quickly as possible.

VOLUNTEERS

Mr. Jim McDonell: I rise today to shine a light on the goodwill and generosity shown by so many individuals and volunteer groups in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. When we talk of Ontario spirit, they have shown its true meaning with their innovative ideas and their giving of their time to their communities. These acts of goodwill truly make a difference for so many, especially those who have difficulty getting out during this pandemic.

The Optimist Club of Cornwall hosted drive-through parades for Halloween and Christmas. Cars lined up for over three hours to get through.

The volunteer fire departments and community organizations organized Santa Claus parades and drive-throughs in Finch, Winchester and Chrysler.

On an individual basis, neighbours picked up groceries and prescriptions for those who are unable to get out and shop. Others have sewn face masks for friends and neighbours when they couldn't find them in the stores.

There are also the volunteers who take our long-term-care residents out for a stroll in their wheelchairs and to the local Legion for their Friday luncheon.

In the same spirit, Mrs. Louise Ballantyne of Cornwall noticed that the Premier was constantly having to remove and replace his mask during his daily updates, so to make it easier, she made a number of mask holders and asked me to hand-deliver them to him personally.

All over Ontario, but especially in Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, volunteers are stepping up to make life better for their communities.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Good morning, Speaker. Meegwetch.

Earlier this month, we learned the cost of policing at Land Back Lane in Six Nations treaty territory. Between July 2020 and January 2021, Ontario spent \$16 million dollars on policing the Haudenosaunee people at Land Back Lane.

Speaker, that could have been all avoided. The nation has repeatedly called on Ontario to engage in a peaceful process that would build a true nation-to-nation relationship. But this call was answered with racist and colonial violence from the OPP and Ontario, and the invitation to the Premier to visit Land Back Lane has been unanswered since day one.

Now the Haudenosaunee Confederacy at Grand River has put in place a moratorium on development in the Haldimand tract. They have said, "Our children are relying on us to protect them. This is a sacred responsibility that every Haudenosaunee person must uphold, and no one, not Canada, Ontario, and certainly no municipality has any right to interfere in our right to protect the lands and waters that belong to our children."

The council has said they understand that they share the lands and agree to uphold the agreements between our people to live in peace, friendship and trust. It's time for Ontario to uphold the treaties.

1020

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Mr. Norman Miller: Yesterday, I had the opportunity to join the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks and the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry for an exciting virtual announcement. We announced that our government will fund 16 projects that resulted from the good work of the Muskoka Watershed Advisory Group. The government has entered into funding agreements with the district of Muskoka for 15 projects and the town of Bracebridge for one project.

We are investing \$4.25 million in these projects to address three main issues: The first is a long-term goal of creating an integrated watershed management strategy for the Muskoka watershed, the second is addressing flood mitigation in the shorter term, and the third is ensuring the health of the watershed and water quality.

These projects have all come from the 19 recommendations made by the Muskoka Watershed Advisory Group.

I want to take a moment, again, to thank the members of this group for their hard work and dedication to ensuring the health and future of the Muskoka watershed.

Thankfully, this spring has not brought flooding or high water within the Muskoka watershed, but after significant flooding three times in the past decade, water levels are an annual worry for many residents. That's why I'm pleased to see funding for a number of projects that focus on flood mitigation. Many of these projects will involve a great deal of community involvement in consultations and in more formal roles within a community round table and task force. I hope that residents who are interested in protecting our beautiful lakes, rivers and wetlands will get involved with these projects.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Michael Mantha: I've been in my seat over the last couple of months listening to this government make statements, as far as misleading—a disservice towards the opposition—when they're raising the concerns that have been raised by many health care professionals across this province and community leaders in regard to bringing in paid sick days. We know that the federal sickness wage replacement program can only be accessed if a worker contracts COVID-19 and cannot be used to cover

vaccination appointments. This is a fact. This government has been steadfast in their position, claiming that the federal program answers all the needs of workers across this province.

Recently, I've heard some backtracking coming from the House leader, coming from the Minister of Health yesterday during an interview, coming from the Minister of Labour. I hope—and these are giving me signs—that this government will be supporting our opposition motion that we will be bringing this afternoon in regard to focusing on bringing vaccinations to essential workers and bringing in paid sick days to workers across this province. It is my hope that we will finally see this done by this government. We heard from many municipal leaders across this province. We have heard from the experts at the table.

What I am asking this government and pleading with this government—support the vaccination of essential workers. This afternoon, you have the opportunity to bring in paid sick days.

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

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. John Fraser: We all got a bit of an April surprise today, and I do have to say walking to Queen's Park this morning was really quite peaceful and beautiful. The place looked great. It was very healing. Nature always finds a way of giving us what we need, so we have to give nature what it needs.

April 22 is Earth Day. It's a celebration of the world's largest environmental movement.

In fact, every day is Earth Day, and it's up to all of us together to protect our planet.

Climate change is the greatest challenge for our generation. It is vital that we reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. I was proud to be part of a government that understood this and that introduced a plan to reduce our carbon footprint.

This government has gone in the opposite direction. They ended the cap-and-trade program and put nothing in its place. They axed the Environmental Commissioner. They gutted conservation authorities. They passed legislation allowing a minister to pave over a wetland to build a warehouse. And now they want to spend billions of dollars on a highway through protected lands that nobody wants.

Speaker, good environmental policy is good economic policy.

To quote Ernest Hemingway, "The Earth is a fine place and worth fighting for."

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Mike Harris: Earlier this week, I was pleased to share some exciting news with Kitchener–Conestoga and all of Waterloo region: As of yesterday, everyone 40 and older is now eligible to get the AstraZeneca vaccine at

participating pharmacies and through certain primary care physicians.

COVID-19 has touched nearly every aspect of our lives and has presented challenges that no one could have predicted. But we are getting closer to defeating this deadly virus, and the best way to do that is through vaccines.

Let me be clear: All of the vaccines that Health Canada has approved for use in Ontario are safe and effective. Vaccines are the best way to protect your health and the health of those around you. And your first choice for a vaccine should be the first one that is available to you.

There are over 50 pharmacies across Waterloo region offering the AstraZeneca shot, in Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge, Breslau, New Hamburg, Baden and Elmira.

If you live in Breslau or the surrounding area—this Saturday, the Waterloo Region Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic is also holding a vaccination clinic at Breslau Commons pharmacy. These nurses will be using their day off to get vaccines into as many arms as possible.

So, please, if you are eligible, visit ontario.ca/pharmacycovidvaccine to book your shot today.

There is a light at the end of this very long tunnel, and the more people who roll up their sleeves and get vaccinated, the sooner we can turn the corner.

STEWART CRUIKSHANK

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I stand to recognize and thank Stewart Cruikshank. Stewart retired this month as the executive director of Don Valley Community Legal Services. He started out as staff lawyer at East Toronto Community Legal Services, was executive director there, and then executive director of the merged unit.

I want to thank Stewart for all the work he did to protect tenants. For a number of years now, we've been dealing with renovictions in my riding. People would find out that their landlord had sold their building, and a new speculative landlord came in, intimidating people, harassing them, in some instances trying to bribe them to get them out because they knew they could make a fortune.

Stewart made himself available to those tenants. If it was a Sunday morning meeting in somebody's living room, if it was a Tuesday evening in a parking lot behind the building, if it was in a room in a recreation centre, he came, he brought legal knowledge, he calmed people down, and he gave them the tools they needed to fight and protect themselves. He did an extraordinary job.

I want to thank him on behalf of my riding, Toronto–Danforth, for all he did to help protect people's homes and make their lives better. Thank you, Stewart Cruikshank.

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL

Mrs. Robin Martin: I rise today to thank this House for passing my motion—motion number 155—to establish a Holocaust memorial by unanimous consent on Monday morning.

As we did not have the opportunity to debate this motion through the usual process, I just want to put a few words about the motion on record.

Motion number 155 states that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario will, in broad consultation and direct engagement with Ontario's Jewish community, establish a Holocaust memorial on the grounds of the assembly no later than 2025.

Earlier this month, we marked Yom ha-Shoah, Holocaust Memorial Day, which is Israel's official day of commemoration for the six million who perished at the hands of the Nazi regime. Yom ha-Shoah, of course, is widely observed outside Israel, as well, by the Jewish community and others. In years past, these commemorations would happen in person, and I have attended many of them at synagogues in and near my riding. I recall outdoor ceremonies at Mel Lastman Square, as well.

Last year and this year, many of those commemorations went virtual. But make no mistake; there will come a time when we can gather together in person once again to mark this tragedy.

I think a permanent memorial on the grounds of the Legislature will establish an excellent place for those gatherings to take place in the future, an excellent place for us to remember and reflect on the horrors of the past, and an excellent place to affirm, "Never again."

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. David Piccini: It's an honour to rise in the House today.

This past year has been incredibly difficult on the people of Ontario, as governments across Canada and across the globe battle the COVID-19 pandemic to protect the health and well-being of their citizens.

1030

I want to take a special moment to highlight the remarkable work of our small businesses. These small businesses are the backbone of our economy, the lifeblood of small communities like mine. This pandemic has not been equitably felt by everyone, and it has been harder on many of our small businesses.

It's hard being a small business at the best of times, but I think to my friend George from Olympus Burger, who I spoke with the other night, who has pivoted well with takeout and who has stood tall, offering gift cards to support other small businesses in our community. I think to Jess Dodd, new owner of the Beamish in Port Hope, and what should have been the most exciting summer of her life, but who has instead been navigating the pandemic; salon owners like Ben in Newcastle, whose stories will forever be etched in my mind; Rino Ferreri in Cobourg; Gina Boyd in Brighton; Sharpe's Food Market in Campbellford, which had an army of volunteers delivering food to the most needy; and Rob from Wrap It Up-N-Go in Norwood, who dealt with the tragic passing of his dad, but who has pivoted to continue to grow that business. This member's statement isn't about the supports; this member's statement is about them—the work that they do

in our community, the selfless attitude, the get-up-and-go attitude every day, the backbone of our economy.

I thank you, and I appreciate the work you're doing. We all in this place and in this country owe you a debt of gratitude.

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

I've been informed that the Leader of the Opposition has a point of order she wishes to raise.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to ensure that today's debate on opposition day motion number 4, calling for an essential workplace safety plan with paid sick days and paid time off for vaccinations to protect Ontario workers and businesses from COVID-19, starts no later than 4:30 p.m. this afternoon.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to ensure that today's debate on opposition day motion number 4 starts no later than 4:30 p.m. this afternoon. Agreed? I heard a no.

The member for Ottawa South has informed me he has a point of order.

Mr. John Fraser: I seek unanimous consent to move a motion regarding the immediate passage of Bill 247, the Paid Personal Emergency Leave Now Act.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The opposition is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion regarding the immediate passage of Bill 247. Agreed? I heard a no.

The government House leader has informed me that he has a point of order that he wishes to raise, and I'll recognize him now.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm seeking unanimous consent that the House return to orders of the day today at the ordinary hour of adjournment and that it meet until midnight.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking the unanimous consent of the House that the House return to orders of the day today at the ordinary hour of adjournment and that it meet until midnight. Agreed? I heard a no.

It is now time for oral questions.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, we're in big trouble here in Ontario. We now have 790 patients in ICUs in our province—72 new admissions over the last 24 hours—and 32 more people have lost their lives to COVID-19 in that time, just in this last day.

We know very clearly what to do. The science table has set out very clear and simple recommendations as to the measures that the government needs to be taking. Of course, one of those key recommendations is paid sick days.

My question to the Deputy Premier is: After a year of ignoring this advice to bring paid sick days to Ontario—the advice from the science table and so many others—is the government finally prepared to listen?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: As the Leader of the Opposition will know, of course, we moved very quickly on this a number of months ago, with respect to paid sick days. The Premier negotiated a very comprehensive agreement.

As I said earlier in this House—I believe it was Monday—we were disappointed that the federal budget did not include some of the enhancements that we had asked for, that we were assured would be in that budget. Given those enhancements that we had advocated for—we have been very clear that the government of Ontario will be coming forward with additional enhancements in the very, very near future.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: We'll see what tomorrow brings, but we know what the track record is of this Ford government. The two measly sick days that we had in Ontario were cancelled by this Ford government—one of the first things they did when they took office.

We know that the government of Canada proposed a national program. Here is what our Premier said when that was announced: "I don't support it." That's what the Premier said. He also said it's a waste of taxpayers' money to save people's lives with paid sick days. Then he accused folks who have been advocating for paid sick days for some time, including his own science table—that we were trying to confuse people about the need for paid sick days in our province.

What has changed, now that the government finally acknowledges that paid sick days are exactly what Ontario workers need and deserve, when, for the last year, they've been saying it was the wrong thing?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Obviously, just the opposite—that's why the Premier worked hard to ensure that there was a very comprehensive made-in-Ontario plan, a plan that was, quite frankly, applauded by the leader of the NDP federally, somebody who used to sit in this chamber.

In fact, in a press release many months ago, the national leader of the NDP, whose convention the Leader of the Opposition recently spoke to, made a great deal of hay out of the fact that he had negotiated a nationwide sick benefit for all Canadian workers.

There have been certain changing circumstances. We've seen that variants of concern are troubling. We're seeing troubling circumstances at our border, as the vaccine supply has not materialized the way it should have. It's very clear that we need to supplement the original plan that was negotiated by the Premier. Given that there's a \$700-million surplus in that program, given the failure of the federal government to move on it, we will be moving on it very quickly.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Entire families are in the ICUs of Ontario because of this government's inaction when it comes to paid sick days. We can't wait another week for the Premier to dilly-dally around doing the right thing for our workers in this province. We're over a year into this pandemic. Workers have lost their lives. Young mothers are in ICUs with COVID-19, getting sick. Children have lost their parents.

This government can no longer ignore the science. It can no longer come forward with half measures and delays.

When will the government bring forward a real, effective paid sick day program for Ontario's workers?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Obviously, as I just said, given the failure of the federal government to address the challenges, the obstacles in the current Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit, the province of Ontario will be moving to supplement that for Ontario workers.

We understand how important essential workers are to the province of Ontario—and not just the front-line workers in our health care system, who have been extraordinary heroes throughout this, but, yes, those workers who have kept the supply chain going. When we go to our grocery stores and we see the cashiers—when we go to the grocery stores and are able to buy things, it's because somebody is working somewhere to ensure that we have the ability to do that.

That is why we worked so hard with the federal government to ensure that there was an original benefit for workers. We thought we had been explaining to the federal government that, given the lack of vaccines and given the shortage of vaccines, that had to be supplemented.

I was very clear on the measures that we think needed to be taken, and the government of Ontario will be moving quickly to make sure that that happens.

1040

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Deputy Premier.

Yesterday, I was joined by Dr. Danyaal Raza to talk about the need for paid sick days in our province. He was pleading, like so many others, with the government for a true paid sick day program where workers don't lose any pay if they stay home sick. Working people don't take sick days if they think they're going to lose pay. So it's a matter of acting, but getting it right.

My question to this government is: Will they do exactly the right thing and make sure that no worker will lose pay by taking a paid sick day, that they will be fully paid when they stay home sick?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Of course, we moved very quickly to protect workers in the province of Ontario, with respect to protecting their employment as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded.

We did work very closely with the federal government for a number of months—where the federal government

was to handle transfers to people and individuals and the province of Ontario would focus on health, long-term care and education.

But as the control of variants—we've seen the challenges that we're facing at the border—as the supply of vaccine failed to materialize in the way it should have or the way we were told, and given the failure of the federal government to move on Monday as we were assured they would—it is absolutely correct: We need to ensure that these essential workers, who are so important not only to the economy but to ensuring that we can get through this pandemic, are taken care of.

We will be moving on the exact same things that I mentioned in this House on Monday.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The last thing that sick and dying workers in this province need are empty platitudes from government. It's too late for any of that. We see what's happening to the workers in this province because the Premier refused to act.

What we need is a program for paid sick days that is easy for people to see through, easy for people to take advantage of, where there are no barriers, where there are no requirements for doctors' notes, where there are no application forms required, where there is no waiting for benefits. This is the kind of program that's necessary to actually help workers to stay well. In fact, my colleague from London West's Bill 239 does exactly those things.

So will the government today commit to a barrier-free, accessible paid sick days program like is outlined in Bill 239? Just vote for that bill, and we'll be good.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, we will be working very quickly to fill the gaps that the Canada sickness response benefit currently has. As I said, we were assured that those gaps would be filled—like a number of members, I too was disappointed to see in the federal government budget on Monday that that didn't exist. I was even more surprised when they celebrated a \$20-billion surplus in their pandemic response.

Having said that, the Leader of the Opposition is quite correct: Those essential workers who are working to keep this economy going, but more importantly, to help us get through this pandemic—workers like those at Novo plastics in the riding of Markham–Unionville. These are people who are working very hard every single day. They're working at more than one job, in many circumstances. It is very difficult for them. They had a benefit that was there. It does not go far enough, especially given the fact that we have not been able to vaccinate and get the supplies of vaccines in as quickly as we were told they would be—in February, March, April, and now heading into May.

The government of Ontario is going to move quickly to fill the gaps that the federal government left behind, and that is coming very shortly.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, we all know that doctors, nurses, experts, the government's own science

table, have been pleading with this Ford government for over a year to do the right thing when it comes to working people in this province. The stakes could not be higher, as we all know. The ICUs are bursting at the seams. Front-line health care workers are working off their feet. They are stressed. They are fearful, going into work every day, to see what might be facing them at every shift.

The government needs to do the right thing. They need to bring in paid sick days, and they need to bring in a program that works for working people.

The NDP has a motion today on the order paper that is supposed to be debated. It calls for paid sick time off. It calls for paid vaccination time off.

Will the government do the right thing: Stop trying to get rid of that NDP opposition day motion, debate that motion with us, and then support us and start working to save workers' lives?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I do appreciate the question from the Leader of the Opposition.

The Leader of the Opposition herself just refused unanimous consent to have the legislative session today go through until midnight on the order paper. I know she's very upset about this, but on the order paper are two very brief motions which will not take away from the opposition day timing with respect to night sittings going forward to the end of the session. I think it's very important.

With respect to the opposition day motion on the order paper, I can tell the Leader of the Opposition very clearly, we will not be supporting that motion, because it is vague, it does not provide enough specifics.

As the Leader of the Opposition just said, we have to provide the people of the province of Ontario, the essential workers of the province of Ontario, who have been working so hard to keep this economy going, but more importantly, to help us get through this pandemic—we need to give them real measures. In light of the fact that the federal budget didn't accomplish that, we will—no half measures.

That's why we will not be supporting that motion. I look forward to the fulsome debate on it this afternoon.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

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

The science table is clear that non-essential workplaces must be shut down to save lives and to save workers from contracting COVID-19.

Yesterday, a group of 40 doctors, medical professionals and scientists released an open letter: "Ontario is now facing the most challenging health crisis of our time. Our case counts are at an all-time high. Our hospitals are buckling. Younger people are getting sicker. The disease is ripping through whole families."

The government is still not listening to these experts.

In Peel, chief medical officer Dr. Loh had to take steps to protect workers because this government clearly won't. Dr. de Villa in Toronto echoed similar sentiments. Dr. Loh has said that, in the absence of paid sick days, he was left

with no other choice, and that's why he issued an order to close any workplaces with outbreaks of five or more cases.

Why is the Premier refusing to protect workers in Brampton and Mississauga, as their own science table is recommending?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Just to be clear: These are, of course, authorities that the chief medical officers of health of Peel and Toronto have had throughout this pandemic. These are not new measures. In fact, as I said, they've had these authorities throughout.

We have, of course, done a number of measures to address hot spots and essential workplaces, even given the fact that the vaccines have not materialized as we were promised they would in February, March, April and now heading into May. We have moved vaccines so that we can go directly into hot spot communities. We've gone into these essential workplaces so that we can ensure that we are getting vaccines to them quicker. I think that ultimately that's what the workers in the essential workplaces I've talked to want. They want to be working, and the way that we can ensure that they are working is by getting vaccines in their arms. In the absence of that, we have to protect those workers.

In the absence of federal leadership on this, the province of Ontario will fill the gaps that we were assured would be closed on Monday. They weren't, and we will take action to ensure that they are.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: Speaker, what workers want in the province of Ontario is paid sick days and actually to be protected by this government. But they continue to ignore those pleas. The science table made it abundantly clear yesterday. They wrote, "The list of what stays open must be as short as possible."

We know from Dr. Loh's orders that workplaces in Brampton and the rest of Peel continue to be unsafe, but this government hasn't enforced additional safety measures in any of those workplaces. They haven't provided paid sick days or prioritized workers in these warehouses and workplaces for vaccines. As a result of this, people are risking their lives, getting COVID-19 and spreading this to their families. This is putting our ICUs in distress. What does this government not understand about this?

My question is simple: Has the government calculated the cost of providing paid sick days to workers versus the cost of their inaction and the cost to our health care system and economy?

1050

Hon. Paul Calandra: As I just said, Mr. Speaker, we have made significant movements with respect to ensuring that our essential workers could be safe. That is why the Premier negotiated the initial Canada sickness response benefit. We were assured that on Monday that would be supplemented to fill in some of the gaps that we had, especially in light of the fact that the vaccines did not arrive in February, March, April and now probably

heading into May, and despite the fact that our international borders were causing us tremendous difficulties.

The member is right: We have to do more to protect essential workers, and that's what we are doing. We're transitioning to ensure that essential workplaces are vaccinated. We're ensuring that hot spots are vaccinated. Despite the lack of supply from the federal government, there's almost—if I'm not mistaken—close to four million Ontarians who have received their first vaccination. We're getting the job done. More has to happen—it's unfortunate that that didn't happen in Monday's budget, as we were assured it would.

We will move quickly to ensure that all essential workers, who are so important to getting past this pandemic, are protected.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. Dave Smith: We're in the middle of a dangerous third wave of COVID-19—a wave largely caused by variants of concern brought here from other countries.

Yesterday, in India alone, more than 300,000 daily new cases were reported and 2,000 deaths—a third of yesterday's global case counts. While it's not yet confirmed by public health authorities, the evidence seems to suggest that the new double mutant variant B.1.617 may be more virulent, more transmissible and may be responsible for India's overwhelming second wave.

Mr. Speaker, it's really very simple: We need to close our borders to stop the variants from getting in.

Will this government call on the federal government to secure international borders immediately?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member is right.

Let me first say this: We have really enjoyed a wonderful relationship with the people of India, so our hearts go out to them. We understand how difficult this is for them. They have been incredible partners for us.

I've heard from a number of my constituents who have family back in India who are very concerned about this.

But ultimately—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I can't exactly hear what's being said by the opposition, but I would caution you. And please stop heckling.

Government House leader to reply.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, what we're calling on is that the federal government do a better job of securing our borders. This is very, very important. We have seen variants of concern coming from other international jurisdictions into the province of Ontario, into Canada, and the federal government has to do a better job of helping us secure these borders. Hundreds of people are coming in, landing every single day, bringing in more variants of concern, and we have to get a handle on this.

So I say very clearly to the Prime Minister, please close down our international borders.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: In the last two weeks, there have been at least 17 flights from India to Toronto with confirmed COVID-19-positive cases. On these 17 flights, more than 260 rows of passengers were deemed “affected” by the confirmed cases. This could represent literally thousands of possible exposures.

The right thing to do is to secure the borders, and only the federal government can do that.

Will this government insist that the federal government act now before it is too late?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, it’s a very, very good question.

It is very important—it is essential—that the Prime Minister heed the words of those provinces that still have international flights coming in. It is time that we get control of the borders. I’m pleading with the Prime Minister that he take action to secure our borders.

These variants of concern that are coming from international jurisdictions are having a dramatic impact on places like Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec, and we have to do all that we can to secure our borders to stop this from happening—and it’s not only about importing variants of concern; it’s about exporting it, as well. It’s about Canadians going to other jurisdictions and people coming to this country. This is an enormous problem in Canada right now.

I am pleading with the Prime Minister to secure our borders so that we can get control of these international variants. We saw what happened with the Brazilian variant. We saw what happened with the UK variant. We saw what happened with the South African variant. He needs to take control of those borders so that we can get control of this pandemic here in the province of Ontario and across Canada.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is to the Deputy Premier. This question is about government ethics and priorities.

The Premier managed to shock Ontarians once again by planning a political fundraiser with tickets costing \$1,000 per person in the middle of a disastrous third wave. This week’s fundraiser has now been postponed. But over the last week, the Premier has held a slew of cash-for-access fundraisers—and charging thousands for a chance to meet the Premier—while our hospitals are overrun with COVID-19 patients in ICUs.

Why is this Premier meeting with donors instead of the doctors and experts who can get us through this crisis?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: In fact, that is what not only the Premier but I would certainly hope all members of this Legislature have been doing—meeting with officials in their ridings; meeting with constituents in their ridings. I know that I have been doing that on a daily basis, and I

would hope that all members—in fact, I know that all members have been doing that.

This Premier has been working non-stop since well before the pandemic to put the province of Ontario back on the right track. We inherited a devastating situation—whether it was out-of-control budgets, whether it was a health care system that hadn’t received proper investments in over a decade, long-term care that was a mess, transit and transportation systems that were outdated and needed renewal. This Premier got to work right away.

When the pandemic hit, this Premier moved into action right away—and it wasn’t just this Premier; it was all of the colleagues on this side of the House. And to the great credit of all members of this Legislature, we all worked together to help defeat this pandemic.

There is a light at the end of the tunnel, and if we continue to work together, we will get past this.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again to the Deputy Premier: This question is about the priorities of this Premier and this government.

The essential workers this government calls heroes could never afford these exclusive fundraisers, but those are the people the government needs to hear right now.

Last Thursday’s fundraiser happened at the same time cabinet was supposed to be meeting to plan a response to the COVID-19 crisis.

In the middle of an unprecedented crisis, will this government finally focus on the issues that matter to all Ontarians?

Hon. Paul Calandra: That is what we have continued to do right from the beginning.

I note that the Leader of the Opposition actually spoke at the NDP national convention last week or the week before, and I would have hoped that she would have brought a message to her former caucus colleague and now the leader of the NDP in Ottawa—a message that we needed the federal government to live up to its commitment to improve the Canada sickness response benefit. But that’s not the message the leader of the official opposition took to a partisan convention.

Instead, I will ask her this, point-blank: Will she call her national leader and suggest to him that he vote against the federal budget—a federal budget that had \$20 billion in unspent pandemic response, a federal budget that did not improve the Canada sickness response benefit the way we were hoping? Will the Leader of the Opposition, will all of the members of the NDP stand in their place and ask their federal leader to vote against that federal budget, because it didn’t meet the needs of the people of the province of Ontario?

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: My question is for the Solicitor General.

Last Friday, this government tried to turn Ontario’s police forces into its own political enforcement service by stating that officers could now randomly ask pedestrians

and motorists for their identification and why they aren't at home. We were then led to believe that the government "walked back" these regulations, as the Solicitor General publicly stated that the new regulation would add a belief requirement. Unfortunately, upon reading the regulation—there is no belief requirement imposed on an officer, and this government didn't walk back anything. In fact, the rewritten regulation is now even worse.

Will the Solicitor General admit that she didn't properly explain the rewritten regulation and confirm that the new regulation has tossed away one's right to remain silent by compelling them to give the police information, and has allowed the police to question people based not on a belief but on a suspicion that someone is attending an outdoor gathering?

1100

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As I've said continuously, it is critical for all Ontarians to respect the stay-at-home order to prevent people getting COVID-19. We need to stop the spread.

Although the vast majority of Ontarians have respected the public health measures put in place, individuals continue to put others at risk by gathering with those outside of their household.

Our priority has always been to address and discourage gatherings and crowds that violate the stay-at-home order. We have the potential to do this right and to stop the spread of COVID-19 and to give our ICU capacity the space they need to protect people across Ontario.

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Last year, I encouraged the Solicitor General to read Bill 195, and now I'm encouraging her to read her own regulations that clearly state "reason to suspect" and an "officer may require an individual to provide information." With those two lines, this government has turned the police into judge and jury. And it didn't take long to see the results.

Reports appeared from Gravenhurst of a boy being taken to the ground by officers because he failed to identify and because the officer said, "You don't talk to an adult like this."

Mr. Speaker, if being rude was a crime, at least half of the Ontario PC Party establishment would be in jail. But being rude is not supposed to be a crime in Ontario.

Does the Solicitor General see that the language in her regulation that says individuals have to provide information and no longer have the right to remain silent can lead to physical clashes between officers and individuals who aren't doing anything wrong, like we saw in Gravenhurst?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: We have reinforced and refocused O. Reg. 8/21, "Enforcement of COVID-19 Measures." If a police officer or other provincial offences officer has reason to suspect that you are participating in an organized public event or social gathering, they may require you to provide information to ensure you are complying with the restrictions. As I have said repeatedly, this is all about ensuring that people only go out when it is absolutely

necessary, to ensure that we limit the spread of COVID-19 and protect our intensive care bed capacity.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. Dave Smith: Just last week, the medical officer of health in my region confirmed that we have the highest percentage of variants of concern in our region.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Trudeau was asked by the media why the borders are still open to international jurisdictions with high rates of COVID-19 cases and new and emerging variants of concern. The Prime Minister said that officials would "look at what the UK has done, suspending flights from" other jurisdictions and what more can be done and should be done to ensure we're not getting cases from overseas. The Prime Minister suggests that there's a lot to look into here and that there is a lot to study.

While the federal government looks into this, perhaps this government can tell us exactly what needs to be done to ensure that we aren't bringing in variants of concern from outside of Ontario.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I would say to the honourable gentleman, it's a very good question—but it is also about us exporting.

Again, let me reiterate to the people of the province of Ontario and to Canadians in general: As much as we have seen an influx—and we are seeing daily an influx—of other jurisdictions and international variants of concern into the province of Ontario, it is also very important that we do our job to not export COVID-19 to other jurisdictions.

The province of Ontario has led the way with respect to our international airports—we've asked the federal government to do that. Isolation centres—we asked the federal government to do that.

When you're looking at those variants of concern—other jurisdictions have moved more quickly to restrict access to their countries. We have to get control of our international airports, in particular, and our border crossings. These variants of concern are very, very troubling, and when combined with the lack of supply that we're seeing in vaccines over the next number of weeks, it is very important.

I plead with the Prime Minister: Take action on our international borders soon.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: This is a very serious situation. We have thousands of flights each month and tens of thousands of people flying into this country, potentially with exposures to COVID-19.

At the outset of this pandemic, Canada closed its borders; other jurisdictions have done the same. We've looked at Taiwan, New Zealand, Australia, for example.

Mr. Speaker, when will Canada take action?

Will this government do everything in its power to call on the federal government to secure our borders and

protect Canadians from the dangerous new variants of COVID-19?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member is correct.

We hold our hands out to the federal government—we want to work with you on this the way we did with testing at Pearson airport. It was, of course, this government that started testing of international travellers at Pearson airport. A number of weeks later, the federal government did help out on that. It was this government that led the way on isolation centres for those international travellers who were coming into the country and needed to isolate because they were bringing in—those who had brought in COVID-19.

We want to work with the federal government to ensure that our borders are secure. These international variants of concern are causing a dramatic impact on our ability to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. It's not just about those who come here, but it's also about Canadians exporting to other countries.

So I plead with the Prime Minister: Work with us to secure our international borders so that we can put all the necessary resources that we need to into ensuring that the people of the province of Ontario and the people of Canada are safe.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Sandy Shaw: The L9K area in my riding of Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas is currently dealing with an alarming outbreak of cases and positivity rates. But because the Premier and the Conservatives chose their own political fortunes over the people of Hamilton, we still can't get our fair share of vaccines or the extra support that we need to keep people safe.

Speaker, my question this morning is to the Deputy Premier.

This week, we learned the Auditor General is now looking into the PC Party's politicization of postal codes.

My question: When will you stop playing politics and start listening to the experts who are begging you to do your job and keep people safe?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would say to the member opposite, through you, Speaker, that I absolutely disagree with the elements of your statement.

The hot spots were identified initially by the science advisory table. Working with the information that was available through Public Health Ontario, they were then reviewed, taking into consideration other elements such as hospitalizations in that area, ICU admissions, fatalities, issues with respect to language, socio-economic factors, vaccine hesitancy. A number of additional factors were brought into that decision, which was then brought before the vaccine task force and was accepted by the task force. That is the basis upon which we are doing the vaccinations.

Making sure that 25% from the top of all vaccinations be further allocated equitably among all of the 34 public health unit regions, based on population, is making sure that they have those extra vaccines in those hot spots to

halt transmission in those areas, which will help all of Ontario.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I appreciate the answer, but I think we'll be interested to see what the Auditor General actually has to say about this issue.

Every day, I hear from front-line workers, teachers, child care workers, grocery store clerks—hundreds of people—who, despite putting their lives on the line every day, still can't get a vaccine.

Mr. Speaker, you will know the science table has been clear, and they said so again yesterday: We need to get more vaccines and more supports into hot spot areas, and we need to ensure that those at the highest risk of catching COVID-19 are being protected. That means vaccinating front-line workers.

So again, my question, through you, Mr. Speaker, and to the Deputy Premier: Will you listen to the science table this time, or are you going to pretend that you know better?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Since the beginning of this pandemic, we have been listening to the advice of the medical experts and taking their advice. The entire vaccination rollout plan was designed with the assistance of the medical advisers, with a bioethics table—to advise that we need to vaccinate based on age and risk, and concentrate in the vaccine hot spots. That is exactly what we are doing. That is why we have designated the top 25% of vaccines to go to those public health units where they're having particular difficulty—and I would specifically mention Peel and Toronto, where a lot of the hot spots exist right now.

1110

The issue is supply of vaccine. We are being supplied with vaccines, as the member will know, by the federal government. We had delays in vaccines through part of February into early March. We're receiving more vaccines from Pfizer now. The AstraZeneca—we will be receiving more. Moderna has been delayed three times, and the supply has been cut in half.

But I can advise that as of yesterday, we were able to administer 136,353 vaccines, so we are—

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

COVID-19 RESPONSE

M^{me} Lucille Collard: My question is for the Solicitor General.

Last Friday, I think we can all say that there was collective shock and frustration felt across the province over the proposal of sweeping and dangerous police powers—so much so that even regional police services spoke out against these enforcement measures.

Then, on Monday, many essential workers commuting from Gatineau to Ottawa found themselves caught in hours-long traffic jams while Ottawa police were stretched thin trying to monitor seven crossing points.

It seems like there was absolutely no coordination or consultation done ahead of Friday's announcement,

resulting in confusion and frustration for so many people across the province.

Did the Solicitor General and the government consult with any of our municipalities and regional police services before their announcement of outrageous policing policies?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As I've mentioned, the COVID-19 variants of concern continue to pose a significant threat to Ontario citizens, and those variants come to Ontario from other jurisdictions. That's why our government issued an emergency order restricting travel into Ontario through land and water crossings from the provinces of Manitoba and Quebec, while continuing to advocate to the federal government to restrict travel from federally regulated aviation. I think it's important to note that the province of Quebec has instituted a similar travel ban into their jurisdictions.

Local police services are best positioned to determine the operational deployments necessary to ensure the continued safety within their communities.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Again to the Solicitor General: Racialized and low-income Ontarians have already shouldered a disproportionate share of the pandemic's negative impacts.

The science table made clear recommendations and advice: Close all but essential workplaces, have paid sick leave, vaccinate essential workers, allow safe outdoor activities two metres apart, and do not further harm racialized and marginalized people.

How could the Solicitor General possibly think that increasing police control is what this province needs?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: In fact, there are a number of measures that the province of Ontario has taken to ensure the safety and security of the people of the province of Ontario.

What I would suggest to the member opposite, and I think she would probably agree with me—the first thing that we need to do is to ensure that we have a proper supply of vaccines that we can get into the arms of the people of the province of Ontario.

Despite the fact that we have seen reduced shipments in February, March, April and heading into May, we have gotten four million vaccines into people's arms, but there's still so much more work to be done.

I would ask the member opposite if she could work with us to reach out to the federal government to ensure that we can get some control of our borders—work with us so that we can get control of our international borders, where these international variants of concern have become so difficult in helping us beat the pandemic here in the province of Ontario and across Canada.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. Dave Smith: Many jurisdictions are struggling with the possibility of more transmissible and more

virulent variations of COVID-19, like B.1.1.7, first discovered in the UK; or B.1.427, first discovered in California; or B.1.617, which I've already spoken about.

In the last two weeks, we've seen at least 17 international flights with confirmed cases of COVID-19. On those 17 flights, we can estimate possibly 2,500 passengers are at risk of exposure to the virus.

Mr. Speaker, if the federal government is not willing to secure our borders and ban flights from hot spots, what can we do to keep these dangerous new variants from entering the country?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: It really is an important question that the member opposite raises.

I can't say it enough—we are pleading with the Prime Minister of Canada to do his part, help us secure our international borders and ban flights from hot spots. It is so important.

We are seeing hundreds of flights come into Pearson airport every single week with hundreds of variants of concern. This cannot continue. We need the help of the federal government to do this. It's not enough that we instituted a testing program at Pearson airport unilaterally, in the province of Ontario. It's not enough that we instituted isolation for those travellers with COVID-19. We need the help of the Prime Minister and the federal government. Only they can stop travel between Canada and those jurisdictions with variants of concern that are out of control.

Please help us and get control of those international borders.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: I believe the minister is quite right: The only way to stop the variants from entering the country is banning flights from those hot spots.

Countries across the world are tightening their borders. You just have to look at Taiwan, New Zealand, Australia. Meanwhile, Canada is accepting travellers from everywhere—on more than 120 international flights in just the last few weeks.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister acknowledged the effectiveness of border closures early last year. He said, "From the very beginning ... we brought in some of the toughest, most stringent travel restrictions of any of our peer countries around the world."

Perhaps the government can shed some light. If these measures were effective a year ago, where are they today?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Frankly, it is shocking to see that the opposition in this place is not supportive of measures that would keep the people of the province of Ontario and the people across Canada safe.

It is not just about us protecting our borders from international travellers who bring in these variants of concern—whether it was the UK variant, whether it was

the Brazilian variant, whether it was the South African variant. We are in the midst of a third wave that started outside of our borders. We need to do more to protect our international borders and our international airports.

I am pleading with the Prime Minister to help us. It is not enough to simply do testing. It is not enough to do isolation. We need to control our borders and stop flights from these international hot spots if we are to get control.

Directly to the Prime Minister of Canada: Help the people of the province of Ontario, close our international borders to hot spots where variants—

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

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Joel Harden: My question is to the Minister of Health.

As many people have already raised this morning, our ICUs are near the breaking point. We're getting close to 800 patients now being treated in our ICUs. Despite this fact, the government has refused to make public its plans for critical care triage in those ICUs.

People with disabilities and their loved ones and advocacy organizations still don't know what has been negotiated in secret and what actually will happen when those life-and-death decisions take place.

At home, Dr. David Neilipovitz, the ICU director at the Ottawa Hospital, told CBC News, "It would be naive for us to think that triage or changes in the standard of care have not already come about." Let's think about that.

Yesterday, the minister rose in this House and said there is no clinical triage protocol, but we know that hospitals received one on January 13. We also know that a training was done for medical professionals on YouTube on January 23.

Speaker, I want to ask the minister, who is very well-versed on these issues: What instructions have been sent out and drafted to emergency medical technicians, ambulance services or health professionals about who will live and who will die in our ICUs?

1120

Hon. Christine Elliott: I can certainly advise the member that no triage protocol has been activated or approved by the government of Ontario. There have been discussions—I understand that there were a number of disability groups who were concerned with respect to a previous draft that was prepared earlier this year. That was then reviewed with the human rights commission. There have been a number of discussions about modifications to it. But nothing has been activated, nothing has been approved by this government.

What we are doing instead is creating the capacity so that we can care for all the patients who come into our hospitals, whether they're COVID-19 patients or emergency patients who otherwise come in. We have created over 3,100 beds since this pandemic began; increased our intensive care capacity by 14%.

We are looking at bringing in other health professionals from other provinces and other countries so that,

notwithstanding having the creation of those spaces, we will also have the health human resources in order to be able to operate them safely, carefully and professionally.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: Earlier today, I was joined by disability rights leaders for a media conference, all of whom are calling upon this government to make public its plans for critical care triage.

I know this minister served as Patient Ombudsperson for this province for years and knows full well that every patient—physiotypical, neurotypical or not—has a right to fair care at the point of service. The minister also should know that hospitals got a critical triage protocol on January 13, that a training has been conducted. So I must admit my extreme frustration that today, when our ICUs are nearing capacity, we are still hearing, "There are no plans."

Speaker, let me say very clearly for this House: "I didn't know"—at this point, not an acceptable answer. "I was just following orders"—at this point, not an acceptable answer. "Please forgive me," to disabled patients and their loved ones—not an acceptable answer.

Will you make sure that people with disabilities are not discriminated against in the ICUs? Yes or no?

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

The Minister of Health to reply.

Hon. Christine Elliott: The rights of people with disabilities has been one of my strongest passions since I got to this place 15 years ago, and I don't need to take any instructions from anybody—

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ha!

Hon. Christine Elliott: —including the leader of the official opposition, about this issue. I have always stood up for the rights of people with disabilities—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Opposition, come to order. The member for Northumberland—Peterborough South, come to order.

The Minister of Health, please reply.

Hon. Christine Elliott: The rights of people with disabilities has been one of the issues that we have cared about and dealt with as part of this entire pandemic. The rights of people with disabilities are equally as important as the rights of anybody else. That is something that I've always stood by, that I always will stand by.

I can assure the member opposite that no triage protocol has been approved. A draft was circulated in January. That was not approved by this government. It was something that has been discussed.

I understand that the rights of people with disabilities have been brought forward. I asked them—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa Centre, come to order. The member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, come to order.

Would the minister please conclude her response?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I asked that this issue be dealt with—with the people with disabilities groups as well as with the Ontario Human Rights Commission. There have been numerous discussions, but nothing has been activated yet, and I can assure you that nothing has been approved at this point. We are working to make sure—

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

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Deputy Premier.

Yesterday, the COVID-19 science table released a road map of what Ontario needs to do to get a third wave under control and to help us safely reopen. The report highlights all the public health measures the science table has been asking for, for months, and what the government has failed to implement:

- reduce the list of essential workplaces;
- reinstate paid sick days;
- prioritize vaccinating essential workers and hot spot neighbourhoods;
- encourage people to get outdoors and have activity—and not carding, shuttering playgrounds or \$1,000-a-ticket fundraisers.

Speaker, it's a road map, it's a prescription for success. So through you: Will the Premier stop ignoring the science and take the advice of the COVID-19 science table so we can end this third-wave nightmare?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Since the onset of this pandemic, our government has relied on the advice and recommendations of our Chief Medical Officer of Health to inform our response. We have also been advised by a number of independent groups, of organizations, including the Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table. They have provided us with critical data, with modelling and with feedback, which has been continuously incorporated into our plans to fight this pandemic.

One key difference between wave 1 and wave 3 of this pandemic is the increased mobility of people. This, paired with the contagious variants, has created the response. One of the greatest determinants of spread is how much people move around. Reducing the mobility is something that has been recommended by the science table; that is what we have brought into our plan. We've learned from other jurisdictions, such as Australia, that limitations on mobility work to control the pandemic. That's what we are working on. That's what the plan is, going forward, that we have relied upon—including from the scientific advisers on the science advisory table.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Throughout this pandemic, the Premier has been slow to act and quick to lay blame.

Today, there are 790 people in ICUs. Most of them are essential workers.

This government took away two paid sick days in 2018. Imagine if those two paid sick days had been here for Ontarians at the beginning of this pandemic—they need more, but imagine: less sickness, less hospitalization, less long-term effects of COVID-19, fewer people dying. The science table has been asking for it for months; just about everybody in Ontario has. It is incredible to me that this government hasn't moved.

Now they're saying, "We're going to fill the gap," a gap they created and until yesterday refused to acknowledge—incredible. And now they're going to pat themselves on the back, like they do every time they come in late.

Speaker, through you: Will the Premier take the advice of the COVID-19 science table and reinstate paid sick days in Ontario today?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I certainly won't take the advice of the member opposite and reinstate the two paid sick days that the Liberals are advocating for—obviously not. We've said right from the beginning, when the NDP were asking for 14 and now that the Liberals are asking for two, that we had to have 20 paid sick days for the people of the province of Ontario. That's what we fought for, and that's what we got.

We know that the federal government has been responsible for transfers to people while the province is focused on health, long-term care and education. We were given assurances that that would be changing on Monday. When it didn't happen, we have been very clear: We will move very quickly to ensure that essential workers are taken care of.

What this member could have done as he sat in the government for 15 years was to ensure that Ontario didn't have the lowest ICU capacity per capita in North America. He could have built more than 400 long-term-care beds. He could have made sure that we had the health and human resources that are needed for long-term-care beds. He could have stopped cutting health care. He could have stopped attacking education. He could have done more on transit and transportation—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Next question.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

This government's choice to put politics over people and their safety is putting lives at risk in London. Plain and simple, London's N6A postal code is dealing with one of the biggest COVID-19 outbreaks in the province right now. But instead of stepping up with the help we need, the government is ignoring their own science table and refusing to declare us a hot spot, denying Londoners essential life-saving supports.

Speaker, my question through you to the Minister of Health: Why are you choosing to ignore the advice of

health experts when you know doing so is putting Londoners' lives at risk?

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, we have been informed by the medical experts about the initial designation of the 114 hot spots. We are prioritizing those hot spots to receive extra doses of vaccines—25% off the top—because we know that if we can get the transmission in the hot spots under control and get more people vaccinated, that's for the benefit of people across the province.

We know that there are other hot spots that are currently being declared. We are distributing extra doses, as well, from the allocations that are coming forward. We know that the original hot spots aren't always going to be the only hot spots, that there are other ones coming forward, and we are prioritizing those areas and giving them extra allocations of vaccines as well, as we will do with London.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The Middlesex health unit's Dr. Mackie just said over the weekend that our vaccines are being cut by 25% to fund some GTA hot spots. He also said that our rates here in London and Middlesex have actually caught up. So we are a hot spot; we're just not recognized.

To make matters worse, on top of refusing to declare us a hot spot, the Conservatives are now actually scaling down the amount of vaccines that Londoners will get. That decision isn't just reckless; it's heartless, and it goes against every piece of advice doctors and scientists have been giving this government for months.

Speaker, again, through you to the minister: Every day you wait to act means more Londoners in ICUs, more stress on our hospitals and families, and even potentially more lives lost. Will you reverse this decision and finally ensure that London hot spots get the support they so desperately need?

Hon. Christine Elliott: In actual fact, the change in the allocation of vaccine doses was recommended by experts at the science advisory table—doing some modelling to determine what that would mean in terms of reduction in hospitalizations, in ICU admissions and in preventing deaths. That is why we have made that change. That is what the medical experts have advised us to do. That will have benefit not just for the people in those hot spots and those areas, but it will benefit the entire province because it will stop the spread from those hot spots, which we know is going into other areas of the province. We've been advised by the medical experts that this is the best way to reduce transmission and to reduce the hospital numbers overall.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is to the Deputy Premier.

Last week, when you announced that 25% more vaccines would go to hot spots, I really was excited about that. I thought that Scarborough was finally going to get

the help that it needs. Instead, the opposite has happened: Scarborough has received nothing. In fact, not only have the two hospital clinics closed, cancelling 10,000 appointments, but today, three additional community health centre clinics, like Taibu and the SCHC, the Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities, have also closed. So the people of Scarborough, when they thought they were getting the help and the support from this government that they need to save lives, are not receiving that—they are not receiving those vaccines. Those resources are now sitting idle.

My question to the Deputy Premier is, will you give Scarborough the priority vaccines that it needs, instead of letting its resources sit idle?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, the answer is yes. We are giving Scarborough the priority resources it needs. It depends on when the supply comes in. When the supply comes in, then we have the resources to be able to do that. We expect the Pfizer vaccines to come in. We know the Moderna vaccines are coming in very shortly. As well, we will be receiving more AstraZeneca.

There are two different situations happening here—one, with respect to those clinics, is the allocation that is granted to the Toronto Public Health unit. Toronto Public Health unit then distributes the vaccines among the providers that are coming forward. When the providers run out of vaccines, they can ask the Toronto Public Health unit for more resources—but that is the allocation that they have received.

The 25% is going to be granted particularly in Scarborough, because Scarborough has 15 of the hot spots.

I can also advise that, due to a recent agreement that was made with Shoppers Drug Mart, they are going to be operating 24/7 in pharmacies in 20 locations across the province of Ontario, five of which are going to be in Scarborough. So Scarborough is going to be receiving extra vaccines and extra times and extra locations for—

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

There being no further business, this House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1134 to 1500.

ESTIMATES

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I have a message from the Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, the Lieutenant Governor, signed by her own hand.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'd ask the members to rise.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending March 31, 2022, and recommends them to the Legislative Assembly.

Members may take their seats.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Wong): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 250, An Act to proclaim Recovery Month / Projet de loi 250, Loi proclamant le Mois du rétablissement.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Wong): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

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

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Wong): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 262, An Act to proclaim Convenience Store Week / Projet de loi 262, Loi proclamant la Semaine des dépanneurs.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Wong): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 270, An Act to proclaim Senior Volunteer Appreciation Week / Projet de loi 270, Loi proclamant la Semaine de reconnaissance des aînés bénévoles.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SHUANG YING COMPANY LTD. ACT, 2021

Mr. Stan Cho moved first reading of the following bill: Bill Pr46, An Act to revive Shuang Ying Company Ltd.

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): Pursuant to standing order 89, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the opportunity to rise today to address the House on behalf of the Minister of Energy, just to provide a very brief update on progress that the government has made on the small modular reactors file.

As you may know, this government is a strong supporter of our world-class nuclear industry in Ontario and the cutting-edge technologies and innovations that are emerging from it. Ontario relies on nuclear power as the backbone of our electricity system. Nuclear provides about 60% of the province's power and provides a reliable, competitively priced and emissions-free source of electricity.

Today, the Canadian nuclear industry supports 76,000 jobs, mostly here in the province of Ontario. Our nuclear refurbishment programs at Darlington and Bruce nuclear generating stations are enabling Ontario's nuclear supply chain to retool, expand its capabilities and bolster its leading position in the global nuclear industry, creating a

strong foundation to pursue further innovative technologies, like SMRs.

Mr. Speaker, we believe SMRs represent one of the most exciting areas of nuclear innovation in Ontario. SMRs are smaller than conventional nuclear reactors and can operate independently or be linked to multiple units, depending on the required amount of power. That's what makes them versatile and a potential game-changer for the energy industry.

Ontario has been working with other Canadian jurisdictions that are similarly interested in becoming early movers on SMR development and deployment for the strategic economic and environmental benefits of this high-tech innovation. Just last Thursday, the Premiers from three provinces and their utilities, Ontario Power Generation, Bruce Power, New Brunswick Power and SaskPower, partnered to release a feasibility study report for SMR development and deployment in their respective provinces. That study confirms the feasibility of SMRs in Canada, and their development would support domestic energy needs, curb greenhouse gas emissions and position Canada as a global leader in the emerging technology.

SMRs have the capability to generate clean, low-cost energy in locations where conventional nuclear technology is unsuitable. That means SMRs could provide the perfect solution for unique energy challenges, such as powering remote communities and mines in our province that currently rely on expensive diesel power.

SMRs have the potential to drive job creation, economic growth and export opportunities. While we're still years away from seeing SMRs operating here in our province, we are indeed on an exciting path. We have a plan to deploy SMRs in Canada, identifying three streams of project proposals for consideration by the governments of Ontario, New Brunswick and Saskatchewan.

Stream 1 proposes a first grid-scale SMR project of approximately 300 megawatts, constructed at the Darlington nuclear site in Ontario by 2028. Subsequent units in Saskatchewan would follow, with the first SMR projected to be in service by 2032.

Stream 2 proposes two advanced designs developed in New Brunswick for potential deployment at the Point Lepreau site. The target would be to complete demonstration units by as early as 2030.

Stream 3 proposes a new class of micro-SMRs designed primarily to replace the use of diesel in remote communities and mines. A five-megawatt gas-cooled demonstration project is already under way at Chalk River, Ontario, with plans to be in service by 2026.

It is anticipated that all three streams will create employment and economic growth for Canada and create opportunities to export technology and expertise to address global issues like climate change and energy security. SMRs represent tremendous potential for improving the lives of everyday workers and families through the creation of new jobs in the SMR sector and a successful post-COVID recovery.

As COVID-19 continues to create challenges, our government will continue to support new technologies and

innovative business models that have the potential to lower electricity costs, create jobs and attract new investments to help our economic recovery.

1510

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that, pursuant to standing order 7(c), the House shall continue to meet past the ordinary hour of adjournment until midnight on the following dates: Wednesday, April 28, 2021; Thursday, April 29, 2021; Monday, May 3, 2021; Tuesday, May 4, 2021; Wednesday, May 5, 2021; Thursday, May 6, 2021; Monday, May 10, 2021; Tuesday, May 11, 2021; Wednesday, May 12, 2021; and Thursday, May 13, 2021, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Calandra has moved government notice of motion number 106, relating to night sittings. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

The motion is carried.

Motion agreed to.

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that, pursuant to standing order 7(c), the House shall continue to meet past the ordinary hour of adjournment until midnight on the following dates: Monday, May 17, 2021; Tuesday, May 18, 2021; Wednesday, May 19, 2021; Thursday, May 20, 2021; Monday, May 31, 2021; Tuesday, June 1, 2021; Wednesday, June 2, 2021; and Thursday, June 3, 2021, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Calandra has moved government notice of motion number 107, relating to night sittings. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, as we are progressing quickly, the Leader of the Opposition earlier had suggested that she would not necessarily be prepared to begin her opposition day until 4:30. I'm just wondering if that is still the case: if the Leader of the Opposition is prepared or requires us to delay her opposition day, in accordance with her motion earlier this morning.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm not sure. I don't know the answer to that question. Would the opposition House leader care to address it, or no?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: No.

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

PETITIONS

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a “Petition to Save Eye Care in Ontario.” It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Michael Mantha: This petition is to save eye care in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I affix my signature and present it to the Clerks’ table.

OPPOSITION DAY

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Whereas studies show that only approximately 10% of low-waged essential workers have access to paid sick leave, forcing them to choose between

taking unpaid time off or going into work while sick in order to pay the bills and put food on the table; and

Whereas federal sickness wage replacement programs can only be accessed if a worker contracts COVID-19 and cannot be used to cover vaccination appointments or to stay home as a precaution by a worker with symptoms of the disease; and

Whereas public health officials, including the Ford government’s own experts, have publicly advocated for the implementation of paid sick days to better protect Ontarians, especially racialized workers and communities that are disproportionately and hardest hit by the pandemic; and

Whereas workplace spread of COVID-19 has accounted for two thirds of community outbreaks in some municipalities, largely in environments without access to paid sick leave; and

Whereas the Premier and cabinet ignored February 2021 warnings from public health officials, Ontario’s doctors and hospitals about the dangers of the third wave, and waited until record numbers of infections and ICU admissions to act; and

Whereas municipal and provincial public health officials across Ontario have been clear that vaccination efforts must prioritize essential workers as they are among those most at risk of contracting the virus and often live in communities that are hardest hit;

Therefore, the Legislative Assembly calls on the Ford government to develop an essential workplaces safety plan with adequate funding and resources to ensure all workers are offered access to the vaccine and paid time off to receive it; to provide provincially paid sick leave for workers experiencing symptoms of or diagnosed with COVID-19; and to provide on-site daily testing at essential workplaces as part of its efforts to curb the spread of the virus.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day number 4. I’ll recognize the Leader of the Opposition to lead off the debate.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I very much appreciate the opportunity to bring to this House a debate on an issue that should no longer have to be debated, frankly; a debate that should have been ended months and months ago—in fact, a year ago, when the experts told the Ford government what the ways were to prevent the virus from spreading. Of course, they have reinforced those pleas, those requests to the government, time and time again. But unfortunately, here we are with a third wave raging through the province, with variants of concern out of control, because the Ford government has decided and the Premier has decided not to listen to the science. I don’t know who the Premier is listening to, but he has not been listening to the science, and we see that Ontario is pretty much on fire when it comes to COVID-19.

When we look at where the spread of the variants is happening, again, we know that the experts have told us, the science table has said it many times, the virus is spreading in hot-spot communities, in places where workers are not able to keep themselves and their co-workers safe.

1520

We do know that the Premier of this province walked us right into this crisis with his eyes wide open because he refused to listen to the advice of experts. He refused to implement the measures that would have prevented us from getting to the level of spread that we now have. And what does that mean? It means that we have a Premier who has basically opened the door to COVID-19 variants and is putting people in the ICUs at unprecedented numbers. It is making people sick at unprecedented numbers.

Just today: 4,212 new cases of COVID-19 over the last period for counting. We had 72 new admissions to ICUs with COVID-19—to ICUs. We had 32 people lose their lives just in this last period, this last 24 hours, to COVID-19—32 people have died from COVID-19 in Ontario over the last 24-hour period.

Speaker, this is an unacceptable situation. It is a tragedy. It is a horror show. And it's happening because the government has continuously refused to put measures in place to stop the spread of COVID-19 in areas where the people are most vulnerable. The people who are in the ICUs now, as everybody knows, because we are being told constantly by the people that are supposed to be providing the advice to the government—or they are providing the advice, but the government is not acting on that advice—that they're essential workers. They're younger and younger people. They're racialized workers. There are whole families now, entire families, that are in the ICUs with COVID-19; pregnant women in ICUs with COVID-19; people who are struggling to breathe, who can't catch their breath, in ICUs; ICUs that are staffed, really, by true heroes.

The front-line health care workers in our hospitals, some of them burst into tears on Friday when they heard that once again the Ford government was refusing to implement the measures necessary to stop the spread of COVID-19 and take the pressure off. Those folks have been battling COVID-19's effects on the people of Ontario valiantly. They've been battling, trying to save lives, trying to ensure that people can win the battle with that disease. For over a year these folks have been doing that work. They are run off their feet, they're exhausted and now they're despondent because their government hasn't been listening to what they should be listening to and making decisions that would actually take the pressure off, as I said. They're terrified to go to work every day to see what kind of new heights of tragedy they're going to have to deal with, how many more people in the ICU that are going to have to be flown who knows where in the province to try to get the support that they need to fight this COVID-19 battle. The hospitals are in crisis. They're buckling because the government did not do the right thing here.

As I said, it has caused so much pain—so much pain and distress for the people of Ontario, for the front-line workers in the hospitals, at the science table, epidemiologists and other advisers that have ignored the government's advice and, of course, the reason we're all here today. It is causing havoc in families of people who are

working in essential companies, in essential businesses, in essential workplaces.

So, instead of doing what the experts said that they should do on Friday to try to stem this horrifying tide, what did the government do? The government set aside the recommendations of the experts again and instead decided that the better thing to do would be to close playgrounds in Ontario—to close playgrounds and bring unprecedented, sweeping police powers to our province. That's what the Premier of our province decided was the solution to raging COVID-19 variants of concern. I mean, it is beyond belief that that's where we ended up—beyond belief.

Here's what happened: As I mentioned, in some cases, front-line health care workers were in tears. We almost had the complete abandoning of the science table by the experts. A Maclean's article talked about it. There was almost a complete abandoning of that science table. Every single member of that science table was contemplating quitting en masse to protest the government's disrespect but, worse, the reckless and dangerous decisions that they took on Friday.

Dr. Peter Jüni, the scientific director of the COVID-19 science table, said on Friday—after that unbelievable, otherworldly kind of twilight zone response that the government had, an hour after the science table said, “Here are the very clear, very simple things you need to do,” and the government said, “Oh, no, we're not going to do any of that. We're going to do all of this other stuff instead: spot checks for people as they're going about their business, no implementation of paid sick days, no implementation of paid time off. Instead, a regulation that pretty much brings a police state to Ontario”—and a regulation, by the way, where, within a couple of hours, one after the other, right up until the next day and probably the next day after that, some 30 or more police services across our province said, “No. We're not doing that.” Why? Because they knew it was a breach of people's charter rights in our province.

How the Solicitor General didn't know that and how the Ford government didn't know that this is what they were doing is beyond the pale. It is absolutely beyond the pale. That was the priority instead of giving people an opportunity to stay home while they're sick and not have to worry about paying the bills? No. They didn't want to do anything to help workers. They don't care about the little guy, like he claims they do. They never have. They don't care. That's why we have all of those folks that are in ICUs right now who are our front-line essential workers.

Here's what Dr. Jüni said: “Yesterday”—Friday—“was one of the darkest days in my professional career and also personally....

“I feel terrible.... I had a crying fit when I was on the call with” co-chair “Steini Brown. He actually tried to comfort me. It's wrong. It's just wrong.” That's what Dr. Jüni said about the government's announcement on Friday.

There is a rampant spread of COVID-19 and everybody knows it. It didn't have to be this way. It was not inevitable. It was avoidable, and, on many instances, the science

table and other advisers told this government how to avoid it. But now we have women, racialized people, Black, Indigenous and other people of colour filling up our ICUs—low-income workers who are forced to make impossible choices. They are forced to make the impossible choice between going to work with symptoms, perhaps not feeling very well, or skipping, not being able to make the rent or buy groceries and put food on the table for their families. Nobody should ever have to make that kind of decision in Ontario—nobody should. But especially during a pandemic, a worldwide pandemic, that this government has allowed to get out of control in Ontario, those workers deserve to have the ability to keep themselves safe, their families safe and their co-workers safe with paid sick days.

Here's what one health care worker named Adriana said. She's pregnant and here's what she had to say, a regular front-line health care worker: "I think they have a responsibility to help every single person. It doesn't matter what" it is, your work. I agree with Adriana. Every worker should have paid sick days in this province.

A TTC bus driver, another front-line essential worker, said this—he lives in the Jane and Finch neighbourhood: "In a pandemic, if you don't have money to survive, what are you going to do?" Well, that's a good question. What does the government think you're going to be able to do if you don't have money to survive during a pandemic? If you can't go to work and your government refuses to provide paid sick days, what are you going to do? You're obviously going to get really sick. You're obviously going to have a very difficult time supporting yourself and your family. But that's not the way it should be in the province of Ontario. It doesn't have to be that way in this province, and people deserve much, much better than what they're getting from this Ford government.

1530

It's not too late to change course. The government can actually do the right thing. There are rumblings that they might do something in the next little while, rumblings that tomorrow we may hear something. They may finally actually listen to the scientists, listen to their experts—listen to their own Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Williams, who said himself that paid sick days are one of those policy areas that would help stop the spread of COVID-19. He said it months and months and months ago, not last week, not the week before. Months ago, he said that.

But the Ford government was not interested in what the science has to say. Maybe that's who they're listening to, actually: Maybe the Ford government is listening to its own anti-science wing of its caucus or the anti-shutdown wing of its caucus. Maybe that's who they're listening to, because they sure aren't listening to the science, and people are getting sick and people are losing their lives as a result. Every single worker in this province needs and deserves and should have paid time off when they're sick as well as paid time off to get a vaccination.

But we know that there are all kinds of other things that have been recommended, things like making sure we prioritize hot spots for vaccinations. This is something

they've said for a very long time, and in fact, the government, gallingly, on Friday, still didn't do what the science advisory table told them to do. The advisory table said, "You have to put 50% more vaccinations into those hot spots." But the government said, "No, we don't believe in science. We don't believe in science. Maybe we'll do 25%, but we're not going to do 50%, because we just cannot abide listening to what scientists say. We've got to fiddle around with it and turn it upside down," and then we end up, of course, spreading the virus in Ontario and having a worse situation than we should. But that's the way the government rolls here in Ontario, unfortunately, and it's people, a few people, who pay the price, families who pay the price, health care workers who pay the price for this government's inability to step up and do the right thing.

Dr. Steini Brown said this; he's the co-chair of the COVID-19 science table: "People should not have to choose between keeping food on the table and keeping others safe by staying home." Dr. Steini Brown also said that we cannot vaccinate our way out of this third wave. He said it many times. And yet, unbelievably, on Friday, the Premier of this province once again suggested that all we need is 300,000 vaccines a day in people's arms and we're going to vaccinate our way out of the third wave. No, it's not going to happen—not because the federal government has got a problem with supply; of course everybody knows that. There are other measures that are necessary to achieve the goal of tamping down this virus, and the government of Ontario refuses to acknowledge that.

There is no doubt that this government needs to do the right thing and step up. They need to close non-essential workplaces, all non-essential workplaces. That's what the science table has told them will stop the spread of COVID-19, and each one of those affected companies and each one of those affected workers with that kind of a shutdown needs direct financial support from their government.

Small businesses are losing their shirts because this government from day one has refused to provide adequate financial support to get them through. I could do a whole opposition day motion debate on that fact alone, watching the government bring a budget a couple of weeks ago that still didn't do what the small business community and chambers of commerce were begging for, to fix that failed program to support businesses.

What else do they need to do? This is what the experts say they need to do: put paid sick days in place and paid time off to get a vaccination; vaccinate faster in hot spots for essential workers—things I've already touched on; limiting mobility between regions; allow outdoor activities to occur. In other words, why would you rather close playgrounds when that's exactly the opposite of what the science table recommended? It is just beyond the pale that this government ignored all of those recommendations—ignored all of them—and instead brought in carding, shut down outdoor activity, refuses to provide the kind of rapid testing at workplaces in hot spots that we should be getting, refuses to provide those paid sick days, refuses to provide paid time off for vaccinations. How can anybody

on the government side—and especially the Premier and the Minister of Health—how can they live with the fact that they have constantly and continuously ignored the advice of the experts, the advice of the science table, walked us straight into an out-of-control third wave and, as a result, led people in our province to a place where illness is worse than it's ever been, deaths are mounting, hospitals are buckling and the province has sunk into absolute chaos? Unforgivable.

Let's hope they do the right thing today and vote for this motion, and let's hope that tomorrow we don't get some other weak, problematic, inadequate—because Doug Ford, of course, doesn't want to spend any money on anything. Let's hope he steps up.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. To the official opposition leader, again, refer to members by their title.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Right.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I knew you knew that. It was just a slip.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It was a slip. I tried my whole speech.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Well, you did pretty well trying. But just to remind everyone, again, we refer to members by their riding or, if they are a minister or a Premier, by their title, okay? Thank you.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thanks, Speaker.

So, on that note, I would say that the Ford government has not stepped up yet, and it's time they stepped up. It's people's lives we're talking about here. He might not value those lives, but certainly, all of the advisers that have been giving him advice do, and that's why they're trying to save those lives, and so are we.

Let's do the right thing here. Let's have the government members acknowledge that we have to step it up. We have to change the channel here—not the political channel, but the channel in terms of where we're headed with COVID-19, and the only way to do that is to listen to the science, stop the inner bickering within your caucus about who's anti-shutdown and who's anti-science, and let's put the nose to the grindstone and save lives here. Do the right thing.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Jane McKenna: Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this opposition motion. We've all heard the children's story of Chicken Little, where the chicken spreads baseless and exaggerated reports that the sky is falling, even though it wasn't. There's certainly a lot of misinformation about COVID-19 out there, and regardless of which side of this House you sit on, we all have a responsibility to tell the facts.

Here are the facts.

Fact: Yesterday, the number of COVID-19 cases in Canada was 2,978 per 100,000 population.

Fact: The number of cases in Ontario was lower than the national average, at 2,860.

Fact: The number of cases per 100,000 population is higher in Quebec, Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Fact: The death rate related to COVID-19 in Canada is 62 per 100,000.

Fact: The rate of COVID-19-related deaths in Ontario is lower than the national average and nearly two and a half times lower than Quebec.

Fact: As of yesterday, Ontario had administered over four million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Fact: The US has administered over 212 million doses, 40% of all Americans have received one dose and 26% are fully vaccinated.

Fact: Canada has administered over 10.2 million doses of the vaccine, 24% of all Canadians have received one dose and just 2.5% have been fully vaccinated.

Fact: Last weekend, the US administered more doses in three days than Canada has received since December of last year.

Fact: Uruguay and Chile have administered more doses per 100 people than Canada.

Fact: Canada's third wave is fuelled by the variants. These variants are spreading like wildfire because flights from the UK, India, Brazil and South Africa, ground zero to four different variants, are still landing in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver—

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I thought you were going to talk about the facts.

1540

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please. I would ask the official opposition leader to withdraw her comment, please.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Back to the member.

Ms. Jane McKenna: Thank you, Speaker.

Yesterday, Canada reported more new cases of COVID-19 than the United States. We urgently need strong action from the federal government on Canada's borders, because so far, Canada's approach to protecting us from variants has been like driving in a storm in a convertible with the top down and wondering why you're getting soaking wet.

COVID-19 has infected more than 142 million people around the world. It has hit those living in poverty the hardest. That's why the second phase of Ontario's vaccination plan identified 114 hot-spot postal codes. These hot spots were determined, just so they're listening, using data and input provided by the science advisory table, together with hospitalization data, outbreak data, low testing rates and deaths during the second wave of the pandemic. This analysis relied on Public Health Ontario data and was confirmed by the vaccine task force.

We know that the leader of the official opposition likes conspiracy theories, so my staff and I did a quick spot check on some of the hot-spot postal codes. We found hot spots included NDP ridings, like Brampton East, Spadina-Fort York, Parkdale-High Park, Toronto Centre, Scarborough Southwest, Hamilton Mountain, Hamilton West-Ancaster-Dundas and Windsor West, just to name a few. There are also a number of independent Liberal

ridings, like Scarborough–Guildwood, Ottawa South and others.

Speaker, I want to mention the K2B postal code in Ottawa. The NDP leader doesn't think it's a hot spot. Health experts know it is. The postal code had 44% more cases per 10,000 people than the provincial average. It had 25% more COVID-19 deaths, and population data showed a racialized community of over 40%. But this pandemic changes daily, which we all know. That's why, as the situation across the province continues to evolve, communities experiencing sustained surges in COVID-19 cases may be identified as hot-spot communities moving forward.

The government is always working with public health units to ensure timely access to vaccines among the identified communities through all available vaccine delivery channels, including pharmacies, mass vaccination clinics and mobile teams. We've also directed public health units to consider accessibility issues in their plans and to have local solutions.

We know that provinces right across the country are struggling with the third wave of COVID-19. Back in December, when Ontario closed ski hills, many people, including the NDP, questioned that decision. Some media outlets said that it was the wrong decision. They questioned why Ontario was the only place in North America to close ski hills.

In British Columbia, the Whistler Blackcomb ski resort stayed open. It was only closed by the BC government last month after they realized the highly infectious variant traced back to Brazil was spreading rapidly. Now, with 877 confirmed cases of P1, British Columbia is the centre of the world's largest sequenced outbreak of the variant outside of Brazil, and nearly a quarter of those cases have been linked to Whistler. I'm sure if the government of BC could go back in time, they would do exactly what we did and close the ski hills.

Speaker, medical experts across the country and around the world don't always agree on what should come next. They don't always share the same viewpoints and they don't all give the same advice. That's why the terms of reference of Ontario's non-partisan public health measures table is so vitally important. It allows for candid discussions that ultimately lead to guidance and advice being provided to the Chief Medical Officer of Health. As you know, the Chief Medical Officer of Health reviews all the advice and data and makes a formal recommendation to cabinet when a decision is made. The expert advice our government has received has led to significant progress.

Fact: When the federal government refused to release modelling data at the start of this pandemic, Ontario was the first province to release modelling data.

Fact: For the first time in Ontario's history, we have an integrated lab system that allows us to conduct more tests than ever thought possible. This allowed us to expand our testing strategy and complete over 13 million tests.

Fact: Ontario's government acted on recommendations by the Chief Medical Officer of Health and other health experts, implemented a province-wide stay-at-home order

and declared our third state of emergency. Our government has been clear that phase 2 of our vaccine rollout will focus on older adults, those at risk of serious illness, hot spot areas and our essential workers in group 2.

In the hot spots of Toronto and Peel, we are also working with public health to set up mobile teams and pop-up clinics. These teams are working with community groups and local businesses to administer vaccines. Doing this helps us vaccinate everyone 18 or older in high-risk congregate settings, residential buildings, faith-based locations and locations occupied by large employers in highly impacted neighbourhoods. Of course, we all want to vaccinate more people faster, but across Canada that depends on a reliable and increased supply of vaccine from the federal government.

Fact: As of today, the Ontario government only has confirmation on numbers provided from Pfizer until the end of April. Allocations for Moderna, AstraZeneca, and Johnson and Johnson beyond what we already have are still unknown.

Speaker, we know the pandemic has created new risks in the workplace that require new ways of working. We also know that controlling infectious disease hazards is new for most employers. That's why, on June 16 of last year, the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development provided employers with a new workplace guide to help them develop a COVID-19 workplace safety plan. The guide includes, among other things, information on the use of face coverings and details on PPE that workers may require. This mandatory workplace safety plan is helping employers identify and control COVID-19 risks in the workplace.

We know there is a lot of misinformation out there on testing, and quite frankly, most of what the NDP are demanding in this motion, we're already doing. Fact: As of yesterday, Canada is testing 790,447 people per one million population. Fact: Ontario is testing more people than the national average, with 908,240 people per million. Fact: Ontario has tested nearly two times the number of people per million as BC. Fact: Ontario has administered nearly 13.4 million COVID-19 tests. Fact: As of yesterday, 45% of all COVID-19 tests conducted in Canada were done in Ontario. Fact: Over 90% of Ontarians who received a COVID-19 test are now getting their results within 48 hours.

Fact: To date, more than 4.7 million rapid antigen tests have been sent to over 1,150 workplaces, including 89 essential industry sites, under the Provincial Antigen Screening Program. Fact: Ontario is deploying 385,000 tests weekly to long-term-care homes and 118,000 tests weekly to retirement homes. Fact: Ontario deploys up to 300,000 rapid tests every week for asymptomatic staff in key sectors, including manufacturing, warehousing, supply chain, mining, construction and food processing.

Speaker, sick days are a vital issue. That's why the first action our government took at the start of this pandemic was creating a new, unlimited job-protected leave under Bill 186, the infectious disease emergency leave. This was the first bill that was introduced at the start of the

pandemic, and I am proud to say that it was passed with the unanimous support of all parties. Ontario is doing our part, and we will continue to do everything we can to protect health and safety.

For the last 81 years, governments of all political stripes at all levels have recognized that the federal government is best equipped to operate and manage employment support and sick leave programs. The Ontario government agrees with this long-held position. Provinces and territories had an agreement with the federal government at the start of this pandemic that provinces would protect jobs and the federal government would protect the income.

1550

Fact: Under this agreement, over \$1 billion was available for Ontario workers to access up to 28 paid sick days.

Fact: To date, over 300,000 workers in Ontario have applied to receive the federal paid sick days benefit.

Fact: There is still \$695 million in funding for workers in Ontario under the federal paid sick day program.

Fact: No other province or territory in Canada has implemented paid sick days during this pandemic.

Fact: The provinces and territories do their part, but the CRSB needs to do better.

I was shocked to discover when I visited andreaorwath.ca that there wasn't a single reference to the federal paid sick day program. Your responsibility as the MPP for Hamilton Centre is to make sure your constituents have the information they need to succeed. On paid sick days you have failed them.

If you live in an NDP riding, please visit canada.ca/covid-19 to apply for the federal paid sick day program.

I have stood in this place numerous times and confirmed that all provinces and territories are relying on the federal paid sick day program. Unfortunately, the Ontario NDP decided to play politics with paid sick days. Instead of standing with us, they undermined the cross-country efforts to push the federal government to improve the national paid sick day program for all Canadians.

If you've ever played poker, you know that you should never show your hand to anyone while playing, but that's exactly what Ontario's NDP did. By making paid sick days a provincial issue for their partisan gain, the NDP eliminated the need for the federal government to fix the national paid sick day program. It's hard to understand why the Ontario NDP decided against protecting all Canadian workers with a strong national paid sick day program. Instead of getting angry with me for pointing this out, the leader of the official opposition should apologize to Ontarians—and, for that matter, to all Canadians—for letting the federal government off the hook on paid sick days.

The federal budget brought in more than \$100 billion in new spending but did not address the concerns that Canadians across the country have raised about the federal paid sick day program. Canadians were disappointed to see zero—no action—in the federal budget on paid sick days and no action on paid sick days at federally owned

corporate corporations like Canada Post, which had one of the largest workplace outbreaks earlier this year.

While the federal government let us down by not improving the national paid sick day program, Ontario's NDP betrayed Canadians by giving the federal Liberals the cover to do absolutely nothing.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Sara Singh: I'm honoured to rise here today and contribute to the debate and support this opposition day motion brought on by the Leader of the Opposition.

As New Democrats and as the official opposition here in Ontario, it doesn't matter what the government says, we're going to keep fighting for workers in Ontario because it's clear that they won't step up to the plate and help get them the supports that they need.

As the member from Brampton Centre, from the start of this pandemic we've been in a hot spot. Our community has been struggling and suffering because this government failed to step up to the plate. What's really concerning is that, as we've gone from lockdown to lockdown, you hear the government talk about, "Stay home. Stay home." Well, workers in Peel, who are helping keep this province moving—many of those workers don't have an option to stay home. Because if they didn't go to work, people would not have food in the grocery store, they wouldn't be able to get their Amazon deliveries, and many supply chains would be interrupted if they weren't able to go to work. But the sad reality is, many of those workers are having to make a difficult choice between a paycheque and their health, because they are precariously employed in low-paying work.

Dr. Loh has been an advocate for our community from the beginning, not just through this third wave. From the beginning of the pandemic, he was clear that many workers in Peel simply don't have a choice. Based on a study that Peel Public Health did—it showed that 25% of the cases in our region went into work while they were symptomatic: "How will we keep these aggressive new variants at bay if our front-line workers cannot afford to take time off and stop the spread?" This is from Dr. Loh at the beginning of this pandemic, very clear that workers didn't have a choice to stay home if they were sick, because they simply couldn't afford to do that.

That data and this evidence has been very clearly articulated not only by Dr. Loh but by medical expert after medical expert, by the government's own science advisory table. Yet they continue to ignore the pleas from not only Dr. Loh, our mayors, experts, workers who are literally fighting for their lives in ICUs, infecting entire families. Mr. Speaker, I don't know if you know what it feels like to listen to families crying on the phone because their loved ones are dying in the ICUs and they are being shipped out of our community. That is heartbreaking.

Short of coming to tears in this House, I don't know what else we need to continue saying to this government for them to understand the reality of what essential workers are currently facing in our province. It's upsetting that you continue to ignore those pleas from those people

who are dying, doctors who have to make decisions between who is going to get life support and who isn't—and they are currently making these decisions. These aren't some far-off triage protocols that they have to implement. They are doing this right now because ICUs are at capacity.

When you could have done something to save their lives, you could have prevented the outbreaks in our workplaces, this government chose not to. It chooses to play political games with people's lives. This is the reality of what is happening. This government, this Conservative government, is playing games with people's lives.

Fifty-three per cent of our workforce, Mr. Speaker, do not have a choice; 600,000 people in the region of Peel do not have the option to stay home, because they work in food processing, they work in manufacturing, they work in our warehouses. And you know what? I applaud Dr. Loh. I applaud him for making a courageous decision to shut down workplaces that are in outbreak, because this government doesn't have the courage to do the right thing, doesn't have the courage to stand up for working people.

Dr. Warner actually estimates that it costs the system \$4,000 a day to have patients in ICUs. Can you imagine what we could do with that money if we gave that to workers so that they could stay home? Not only would we not be straining our health care resources, we would be protecting people. It makes economic sense to do this. It makes social sense to do this.

It's important that the government come up with a plan, and that's exactly what this opposition day motion is calling on your government to do. We're calling on you to stop ignoring the science, stop ignoring the data, stop ignoring the pleas and to finally step up to the plate and come up with a plan.

Not only are we asking for paid sick days, we're asking you to make sure that those workers are getting their vaccines. Every single day I hear from workers who are wondering where on earth these mobile vaccine clinics are that the government has promised our community are coming—not a single one yet.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Call the mayor.

Ms. Sara Singh: Call the mayor? The mayor has been calling you every single day, but clearly you're not listening. I don't know who the Premier has been talking to, but it certainly isn't the people of Ontario.

I would encourage this government, Mr. Speaker, to support this opposition day motion. Help us get paid sick days here in the province of Ontario. People's lives are depending on it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise to speak in support of safe workplaces and paid sick days, Speaker. But before I begin, I just want to thank all the front-line workers who have to go into work every day. I want to thank you for what you have done to help care for people, to help keep our communities open, to help keep food on our table. I want to say to those workers that the government should have your back. The government should have your back.

That is why I, on the very first day we came back in February, put forward a motion for safe workplaces, because even back then it was clear, if you were following the science, that an increasing number of outbreaks were happening in workplaces, and that if we were going to get in front of this virus and start playing offence instead of playing defence, which seems to be how this government has handled the virus from day one, we had to ensure workplaces were safe.

1600

And, Speaker, yes, it starts with paid sick days. It starts with seamless, immediate, full-income-replacement paid sick days that workers don't have to apply for, don't have to wait for. They just know that when they wake up in the morning and they're not feeling well, and they're thinking, "I've got to go into work because I have to pay the bills, put food on the table and take care of my family, but I'm not feeling well, so maybe I shouldn't go," and they're having to make that impossible decision—and far too many workers have to go because they don't have a choice.

So it begins with paid sick days, but it is more than about paid sick days. It is about ensuring that we mandate medical grade PPE in those workplaces where safe physical distancing can't happen. It's about deploying rapid testing to workplaces. It's about ensuring that we not only have inspections, but enforce the rules and penalize companies that are not following the rules. It's unfair to the companies out there who are playing by the rules.

It's about having a vaccine strategy that not only prioritizes hot-spot areas but ensures that those essential, vulnerable, oftentimes low-wage and racialized workers have priority access to the vaccines. Let's take them to their workplaces if we need to, to make sure that people who are not at home being able to look online, make phone calls and have to try to schedule appointments because they're at work can actually have access to the vaccines.

We could have been ahead of this virus if we'd followed the science, if we'd listened to the experts. On February 11, the chair of the science advisory table said that we are headed towards a disaster if the government eases restrictions. The government eased restrictions, and now the disaster is here. So at the very least, what we can do now is to stop denying that paid sick days are needed and to stop blaming other levels of government for not delivering them.

Speaker, it kind of reminds me—remember last summer when everyone was complaining about the commercial rent program because it was set up in a way where landlords had to apply instead of tenants, and we all kept saying, "Fix it, fix it, fix it," and the government kept blaming the federal government, then it finally got fixed and now the program works? Well, the same thing is happening with paid sick days.

The burden should not be on the worker. I'm fine if the government brings in a rebate program to compensate employers, because I know there are a lot of struggling businesses out there that don't have a lot of extra money to pay for the paid sick days right now, but put the burden

on the employer, not the employee. Make it seamless, easy, accessible for the worker.

Speaker, that is what the scientists are asking for; that's what they are pleading for. It's a good thing we finally have a release of the report from the science advisory table. But last Friday, when the government finally said we're going to beef up restrictions, instead of getting what the science advisory table was asking for, things like paid sick days, we got a police state and closed playgrounds. As a matter of fact, there were three things we've now learned that the science advisory table said will not—and I emphasize “not”—work:

Policies that harm or neglect racialized, marginalized and other vulnerable populations—things like carding—will not work, but that's what we got.

Policies that discourage safe outdoor activity will not control COVID-19 and will disproportionately harm children and those who do have access to their own green space. So what did we get, Speaker? Closed playgrounds.

The third one: As noted in repeated studies from around the world, inconsistent policies with no clear link to scientific evidence are ineffective against fighting COVID-19. I think that's what we got on Friday.

Speaker, I'm asking the government—I'm pleading with the government—to be transparent with what the science advisory table is recommending, make it transparent to the public, because if we want to have the public onside, if we want the public to have confidence and trust in government and follow the public health guidelines, they have to trust that those guidelines follow the science. Let the scientists lead, let the scientists be transparent, and follow what the scientists are telling us, because right now, we are facing a humanitarian crisis in our ICU units, and we as a province all need to be together to solve this crisis. The only thing that will bring us together is if we actually don't do the things that the scientists say will undermine our efforts in fighting COVID-19. Let's begin today, by passing this resolution, this motion, and then let's deliver a program that supports the essential workers in this province who have been the heroes during this pandemic.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Joel Harden: COVID-19 may be the worst deadline any government ever dreamed of. What do I mean by that? It is a deadly virus, Speaker, that means the normal thing that happens in politics, which is incrementalism and nipping at the edges of issues—doing that in a context like what we lived in for the last year and a half is, frankly, a deadly strategy for people. What concerns me today, through you, to my friends in government, is when I see people taking their places to speak in this chamber and saying things like “fact” and then uttering statements that mean to downplay what I see happening in our emergency rooms.

Interjection.

Mr. Joel Harden: The member from Burlington is still trivializing the matter. Let me, through you, Speaker, tell that member that people with disabilities right now in this province are terrified of being triaged out of care in our

ICUs, because this government let a virus run rampant back in February when we should have been making the decisions public health experts asked us to: to shut down non-essential workplaces and to compensate those small businesses, to make sure they could do it safely without facing financial ruin. We didn't do that. On Easter weekend, we even opened up the patios. That is on this government here.

Fact: Ontario is on CNN news. This is a global news story, and no amount of science fiction written by my friends opposite is going to get you out of this hole. So I'm just going to encourage you that if I were you, if I were the government, I wouldn't be trying to imagine my way out of the problem, to point fingers at everybody else; I would be squarely pointing a thumb at myself and asking myself: What do I have to do right now in this moment to keep people safe—people like Donna Mortimer?

Donna Mortimer is a child care worker in Ottawa. She works at the Colonel By Child Care Centre, Speaker. Both of our kids in our family went through this amazing child care centre. But Donna, as the president of CUPE 2204, spoke to the Ottawa Citizen today, saying that people are going to work in her union with tears in their eyes and terrified about bringing variants home to their families as they look after others. I want the member for Burlington and the government to think about that. Walk a mile in that woman's shoes before you trivialize this problem.

I want you to think about all the transit workers in the city of Ottawa—

Mrs. Robin Martin: Ridiculous.

1610

Mr. Joel Harden: I just heard the member for Eglinton–Lawrence say that it's ridiculous for me to make these comments, Speaker. Can you imagine? I want the Hansard to reflect that back, that the member for Eglinton–Lawrence thought it was ridiculous to bring the story of a child care worker into this space. Let the record show. Because those child care workers right now need to be vaccinated. Those child care workers right now need an advocate and a government that will prioritize them.

I was in the middle of talking about transit workers, Speaker. Who has been ferrying around the low-wage, essential workers in our urban centres, getting them from place to place? Transit workers. And recently, in the city of Ottawa on St. Laurent Boulevard, transit workers had to—if you can imagine, Speaker; two metres apart from each other, trying to circulate safely outside their workplace—wave a flag to the media say, “Hey, our members are getting sick, and we're worried about people dying from these scary variants.”

Lastly, Speaker, I do want to say, because I spoke about it in question period earlier this morning, it is not a trivial matter to think that what we have right now on our hands—for our medical professions, be they a paramedic or a physician or an ICU nurse—is a draft triage protocol that this government calls an evergreen document, whatever that means. Those are the rules right now. What those rules say is that if you can't demonstrate that you can do 11 certain tasks without any assistance, then you are

triaged down. You're triaged down for a neurotypical person or a physiotypical person. We have disability discrimination written into our ICUs, and you are asking the health care workers to wear this. It's wrong.

So let's make sure we have paid sick days. Let's make sure we vaccinate essential workers. That will help people with disabilities and their families. This government can point a thumb at themselves; stop pointing fingers at other people.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? I recognize the member from Ottawa—

Mr. John Fraser: South.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member from Ottawa Centre; the member from Ottawa South. I'm really happy to be able to follow him, although I don't know if I can get quite to his level.

Speaker, today there are 790 people in Ontario's intensive care units. By tomorrow, there will be 800, and the day after that, 810 or 820. There are thousands of people who are hospitalized, thousands of families at home sick, thousands of people suffering the medium- and long-term effects and thousands of people have died. We lose sight of that. They are families, and a lot of them—in fact, most of them—are essential workers. Why? Because they are the most vulnerable. Why are they the most vulnerable? Because they work in essential workplaces. They're exposed to the public. They take public transit. They have a lot of contact, and they don't have a lot of rights.

When the government took away two paid sick days in 2018, there was a lot of fanfare. Everybody on the other side felt good about taking those two days away—and actually taking away minimum wage and equal pay for equal work, but the most important thing were those two paid sick days. I said this this morning and I'm going to say it again, because it bears repeating: If those two sick days had been in place now, fewer people would have been sick, fewer people would have been hospitalized, fewer people would have suffered the long-term effects of COVID and fewer families would have lost someone they loved. It's that simple. They needed to be here and they weren't. We have failed them. We just don't have to look them in the eye, because if we did, it would be pretty hard.

Today, the government is saying, "We're going to do something about it a year later." It's way too late for too many families. "We're going to fill a gap that we created in 2018 and that we actually didn't acknowledge until a couple of days ago."

The Premier, he was almost the creator of the CRSB, the federal government's, except, last June, the Premier said, "I don't want it. It's a waste of money and workers are already protected enough." Now the government is going to come up with a plan—even next week is too late—and they are going to pat themselves on the back and say, "This is the greatest thing since sliced bread and isn't it all somebody else's fault?" Well, think about looking those families in the eye.

Tomorrow there will be a private member's bill, Bill 247, MPP Coteau's bill for 10 paid sick days. You have an

opportunity to vote for it. I hope you're here tomorrow afternoon to be here to ensure that we have paid sick days for essential workers across Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: When it comes to political ethics, value denotes the degree of importance that politicians put on something. In other words, in political terms, values reflect the principles or the standards of a political party. A party without values quickly becomes a party without value. We're at a tipping point here in Ontario. The COVID epidemic threatens to overtake the resources we have to save the lives of people hardest hit by COVID. The value we place on a meaningful plan of salary replacement shines a spotlight on a party's ethics.

My Conservative friends pointed to Ottawa's cumbersome plan and said Ontario doesn't need another one. Yet the feds help fund mental health in Ontario, they help co-fund programs for those most in need of safe housing, so why do we share the cost of some plans with Ottawa but refuse to listen to the medical experts who support a made-in-Ontario sick leave plan that would save lives? We're all in this together. The bottom line is, the government hasn't acted on the best advice given them by the medical experts.

Finally, they now admit to what we have been saying for months: The federal plan needed to be improved. They say there has been a gap in the system. That gap was between their ears. There's no other way to explain it. They didn't listen. They didn't act. They knew the sick leave plan needed improvement and they did nothing about it until that gap turned into a great divide, and public opinion turned against them. Public opinion wants sick leave plans; maybe finally we'll get it.

I'll say it again: We're all in this together. Down my way, when the pharmacies were first allowed to vaccinate us against COVID, 4,000 of the first 25,000 shots were given to people from Chatham-Kent, London and beyond. Why? Because they heard we had some supply and they didn't. We didn't turn them away. We're all in this together. Our hospital is now relocating COVID patients from Toronto to free up more space in the GTA. We're all in this together, and in this together we should all have a sick leave plan, a sick leave plan to keep us safe.

Sorry, Speaker. I've got to lick my fingers to turn my page, and I have a mask on. I can't get there.

Interjection: And don't lick your fingers.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I have to lick my fingers to turn the pages.

The president of the Windsor and District Labour Council, Brian Hogan, says, "Any reluctance to provide paid sick leave due to the cost is a false economy." We also need smaller class sizes in our schools; we need to vaccinate all education workers as fast as possible and those who offer child care to our youngest children; we need to offer daily testing at essential workplaces; and our vaccines need to go to those who need it most, our essential workers; we need more to save our small businesses.

Earlier, the member from Burlington related what we're talking about today to a game of cards. She said, "You

showed your hand.” Well, when you play cards, you have to know when to hold ’em, you have to know when to fold ’em, you have to know when to walk away.

1620

I get it, and I hope the Conservatives are finally walking away, folding their cards and saying they are going to fill the gap and offer a sick leave plan of some kind in the very near future—something we in the NDP have been calling for for months and months, something the people in Ontario have been calling for for months and months, something the medical experts in Ontario have been trying to tell the government for months and months and months. We need a coherent, safe sick leave plan to save lives, so you can go get a shot, you can isolate, you can quarantine. You can save your family, you can save your neighbours, you can save yourself and your co-workers with a coherent and safe sick leave plan in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I want to start by thanking the leader of the official opposition for bringing this important motion forward.

Speaker, there are few policies that have generated a consensus like this one has. Why? Because everyone—health experts, front-line workers, unions, economists, small business owners, the government’s own science table—knows that paid sick days save lives. Yet the Premier and his Conservative MPPs have opposed it every single step of the way.

Speaker, it took years and years of activism and advocacy to get the former Liberal government to finally give Ontario two measly paid sick days, and the government took even those away. They have opposed paid sick days at the federal level, then tried to tell us that that inadequate plan was enough. Now it’s not enough. Well, it’s hard to keep up. No one is buying any of that.

Ontarians are calling, they’re emailing, they’re demanding that this simple public health measure be implemented before any more people get sick, or worse. It’s really long past time we got this done, and I want to start by urging every member opposite to look inside themselves, look to the working people in their own communities, tell them that they will do what it takes to keep them safe. Because the evidence is there. The experts have told us. The virus is spreading in places where workers aren’t able to keep themselves or their co-workers safe because they can’t afford to lose that crucial pay, because it becomes a choice between staying home and keeping themselves and others safe, or putting food on the table.

I want to stop for a moment, Mr. Speaker, and address the comments of the member for Burlington earlier, because she compared the people in this province who have been calling for more action from their government to Chicken Little. I heard it: “Chicken Little.” She said, “I hope the sky doesn’t fall.” You know what? I hope the sky doesn’t fall on her today. It’s snowing in April in Toronto; anything is possible.

But seriously, that was shocking and appalling—seriously. It is really not reassuring, I guarantee you, to the

people who we are speaking with every single day to hear those kinds of comments. It’s deeply insulting. The front-line health care workers—and I want to tell you, just last night I was Zooming with a friend of mine who is a front-line health care worker at the University Health Network. She said to me that what she is afraid of right now is that they are moving patients away from the University Health Network to make space for more sick people. They are also, I’m afraid to say, overwhelmed and they are seeing health care workers coming in from other hospitals, being pulled away from those roles into the UHN hospitals. Also, and this is coming from the folks in the public health units and the community health centres in my riding, we’re hearing they’re starting to pull people out of the vaccination clinics because they’re going to need those health care workers back again in the hospitals.

You can see what’s going to happen here. Tell all this to the construction workers in my riding. Their families call me in tears every day. Since this government voted down the member from London West’s bill that would have brought in paid sick days, more than 115,000 more people have been infected by COVID-19. More than 700 have died, and we know there is worse to come.

This is an issue of economic justice, of racial justice, of gender justice, of disability justice, and it is an issue of democracy, because the people of Ontario have been clear: You are failing. The cost to this province is immeasurable. Schools are closed. Businesses are shutting down. Mental health issues and anxiety and depression are skyrocketing, especially among children and youth. Youth eating disorders are up 80%. And the heartbreaking reality is that more and more younger people in the prime of their life are ill—really, really ill. Pregnant women are unable to breathe on their own. These people are going to suffer long-term health impacts, and, you know what, some of them—many of them—will probably die.

Our front-line health care workers—the people this government likes to call their front-line heroes, their angels—are being pulled out of our vaccination clinics and put back into hospitals. They are begging this government to do the right thing. Well, do it now. Take this opportunity and do the right thing. Show a backbone. Stand up to your Premier. He doesn’t know what he’s doing; it’s clear. Work with us, and bring in paid sick days.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Mr. Speaker, just one minute while I get this mask off.

All I can think to say today is, how dare this government heckle us when there is not a single minister in the House to hear this debate. How dare the MPP from Burlington say that this is a conspiracy theory that we are putting forward. I’m not sure whether the MPP from Burlington is aware that she now has a total of 2,590 variant cases in Halton, 133 of those new cases of which almost half are people under the age of 40.

I have to say, how dare the MPP for Brantford–Brant backslap over the things that this government has done, when you have currently now 29 outbreaks in your riding.

These are outbreaks in child care centres, in long-term-care homes and in retirement homes. So, rather than heckling us, you should be back in your riding, doing everything you can to protect the people who are now in hospitals struggling for their lives in your riding. I mean, really, no amount of heckling is going to save those lives.

How dare this government sit in their place, in their full sense of privilege in every sense of the way, with all the access to paid sick days that they could imagine, when 42% of workers have absolutely no access to sick days. And you sit there and deny the expert evidence that has been given to you from your own science table.

The quotes that we have here are absolutely dire. This was after the almost surreal announcement of the Premier on Friday—who, by the way, has not publicly spoken about this since Friday, when he announced his response to this crisis was more policing and the closing of playgrounds. We had doctors who were unbelievably raw in their emotion and doctors and health care experts who are showing the kind of leadership—filling a leadership vacuum that has been left by this government.

Dr. Andrew Morris, who is a professor of infectious diseases at the University of Toronto, had this to say: “Just unbelievable. We’re screwed. Well, I’m not screwed. I’ve got a job, I’m vaccinated—I’m going to be working hard for a while, but that’s it. If you’re an essential worker right now, do you know what your life is like now? It’s miserable. You’re going to get stopped by cops, you’re going to have a high likelihood that you or one of your loved ones will get sick and be on a ventilator. And people with young kids, in an apartment: What ... are they going to do? It’s ridiculous. Our health care system is going to totally collapse. I tweeted it was criminal, and I meant that.”

These are medical experts, medical doctors, who are known for their reserve, and this government’s inaction has brought them to the brink.

Today in Hamilton, we reported more than 300 new cases. We are not expected to hit the peak of this wave in Hamilton until May 1. We are also on track right now in Hamilton for the worst-case scenario that was predicted. We’ve already surpassed the height of cases at the second wave.

1630

I just would with like to take the time now to make sure that I offer my heartfelt thanks to the people on the front line in Hamilton, all of our doctors, all of our health care workers and all the people who are working in Hamilton public health, doing their utmost. Despite a lack of support from this government, despite this government not identifying hot spots in Hamilton, despite us not getting the vaccines that we needed, they valiantly soldier on, because that’s what public health does.

In Hamilton, we have a field hospital being built at the Hamilton Health Sciences. I had a look at it and, honestly, it looks like a scene from a movie. But it’s real. It’s not M*A*S*H; it’s real.

All this government needs to do is to put in paid sick days to help reduce the spread and make sure these scenes

of horror that we’re seeing in Hamilton go away. How dare you? How dare you deny the pleas of doctors, the medical experts and all the people on the front line? I implore you, come to your senses.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Today we’re here debating the opposition day motion and we’re really trying to talk some sense into the government to develop a plan for essential workplaces, a safety plan with adequate funding and resources. In the context of this pandemic, that’s not a lot to ask with what we’re seeing going on. If we don’t plan proactively, I want to share some stories of what people are saying if we’re not planning proactively.

In my riding of London–Fanshawe, we have a meat processing plant, and 82 workers tested positive. That employer was actually working with the union representatives and they closed the meat processing plant down for two weeks. Here’s the difference: There were no paid sick days under their workplace, but this employer has decided to pay for that two-week shutdown so that the workers can put food on the table and pay their bills. Now, imagine that scenario, if that wasn’t the case. That’s why we’re asking this government to really consider doing a provincial plan and not the federal plan, which has gaps and a waiting period etc. We’ve gone through that before.

I’m sure I’m not the only MPP in this Legislature who is receiving non-stop emails and phone calls every time there’s a new announcement, every time those numbers go up on an outbreak. We’re flooded. So I want to talk to you about some of the things that people are saying.

Here’s what one of my constituents has said: “How are front-line workers in grocery stores, LCBO, teachers not considered essential? These businesses have been deemed essential in every lockdown, yet they have not been granted access to a vaccine.”

Another business owner of a local moving company in London wrote: “We have been essential through every lockdown. We have altered our health and safety protocols due to COVID and have been successful in keeping our staff and customers safe.

“I feel that my staff should be eligible immediately for COVID vaccinations so that they can protect their families, and we can protect our customers.”

I’ve also heard from London CAS workers, and this is what they have been saying—they also have not been vaccinated: “If there is an epidemic within the agency, the consequences will be devastating as workers are already struggling with COVID fatigue and other physical and mental health concerns.”

Speaker, all workers are exhausted during this COVID: front-line workers, bus drivers, courier workers, the movers, CAS workers, LCBO workers. It’s not just going to work that they’re enduring; it’s the stress and the unknown and what could be around the corner if they don’t have those sick days, if there’s not a safety plan in place to protect these workers. That’s what they struggle with every day, and that wears on them.

We talk about mental health. The government acknowledges there are mental health issues when it comes to

COVID, but we're creating this situation. We need to take a look. We need to look at this opposition day motion and we need to take it seriously and not play politics with people in the workplace, with people's lives. It's so important that we understand that when this is over, there are still consequences of what our actions were, the things we did do and the things we didn't do, and this is something we can do to improve the lives of every Ontarian. Not everyone has the leisure and the luxury of having sick days, and that's something I think we forget when we don't experience those things.

So I urge this government—I mean, they've heard from experts. Public opinion is obviously pressuring this government and pushing them into having a sick-days plan, a safety plan for all workers in this province. And so I ask this government—I urge this government—to consider this today and take it seriously. Don't make it a partisan issue. We're here with solutions that you're looking for in order to get us through this horrible, tragic event of COVID-19.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to share some voices from the Oshawa community and broadly across Durham region as the official opposition again shows leadership and takes the opportunity to call, as they have been consistently during this pandemic, for paid sick days for Ontarians, for those who don't have them; for options and opportunity for a strategy to ensure that people are well not just during the pandemic, but going forward.

It has been very interesting, Speaker, because over the course of the pandemic we have seen the member from London West bring forward her Bill 239 to ensure that people could stay home when they are sick; that was defeated by this government. This, I believe—you can correct me if I'm wrong, Speaker—is the third official opposition day motion where we have prioritized the health and safety of Ontarians specifically around paid sick days. Yes, we're adding in other pieces as this pandemic unfolds about the need to have daily testing at essential workplaces and the need for leave for vaccinations, but we have been consistent.

Interestingly, there has only ever been one speaker from the government benches: the member from Burlington. I don't know how she drew the short straw, but she has literally been, as I recall, the only speaker on each opposition day motion. I'm going to read into that, and I'm going to say that the other government members don't want to be on record speaking against paid sick days, but that is strictly conjecture, Speaker. I am very proud, though, to be on the record and call for paid sick days for Ontarians.

Speaker, I am going to read the motion itself: "The Legislative Assembly calls on the Ford government to develop an essential workplaces safety plan with adequate funding and resources to ensure all workers are offered access to the vaccine and paid time off to receive it; to provide provincially paid sick leave for workers experiencing symptoms of or diagnosed with COVID-19; and to

provide on-site daily testing at essential workplaces as part of its efforts to curb the spread of the virus." Gosh, that sounds like a great idea.

In fact, I'm pretty sure that everyone who reaches out to our office, whether it's front-line essential workers, those who work in health care, those who are connected to the business community—all of us are singing from the same songbook except the government. They're digging in their heels and they're forcing people to make impossible choices. Everyone supports this initiative, from the government's own science table to our neighbours in need who get up in the morning or head out in the evening to do that essential work. We never used to think about it—it just got done—but now we realize that people are dying. They're not dying to do it; they have to do it—but they're getting sick. Their families are getting sick. There is a way to protect them, a way to layer that in.

Speaker, I wanted to share, so it's not just my words, from Ashley, who wrote to me. She's a lab technician. She said, "Due to" this "government's lack of care and attention towards this deadly pandemic we haven't received: paid sick days, enough vaccines, frequent COVID test availability appointments, or a temporary COVID relief pause on bills such as car insurance, rent, and OSAP relief."

She goes on to say that she has had her first dose of Pfizer, but is forced to miss a week of work because of a COVID scare. She says, "Missing this week of work will cause me to lose 25% of my monthly income. 25% of my monthly income pays my car insurance and my gas. But, because of Ford's refusal to implement paid sick days I will be losing these funds that are necessary to my day-to-day life." She thanks us for continuing the work opposite this government.

I heard from Robert Motum, who is a Whitby constituent, who says, "We've known for weeks—if not months—that the majority of new COVID cases are occurring in workplaces and congregate settings. Where is the paid sick leave? I'm exhausted and frustrated by Mr. Ford's insistence that the CRSB is paid sick leave. Surely, you can see this is not the case. Please tell me why paid sick leave isn't a good idea, because I haven't found a single source that suggests wouldn't help the dire situation in which we find ourselves. Certainly coming from your riding in Whitby"—I'm Oshawa, Speaker—"you have constituents in manufacturing who would benefit from such a program."

1640

He goes on to say, "The vaccine rollout has been incredibly disappointing." Anyway, it continues. It's pages, Speaker. But I'm going to stick to this conversation today and say enough with the back and forth from this government about federal versus provincial. We need provincial sick days that are accessed through employers, can be claimed in days, that people can wake up in the morning, know what they need to stay well, they can make that call to stay home instead of being forced to make the impossible choice of going to work and potentially putting people at risk.

We're hearing about workplaces—there was an article yesterday, “Working Under COVID-19: Essential Workers in Durham Want Testing and Vaccine Access.” Workers at a warehouse in Ajax are terrified to go to work. They need on-site testing. They're demanding that.

Speaker, this is a great motion. This government needs to reverse course and support this, support Ontarians and keep them safe, healthy, well and alive.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I try my best to always bring the voices of the people of Algoma-Manitoulin and how they're feeling and the frustrations they're feeling at home. Today, I'm going to bring it even a little bit closer. I'm going to bring it directly from home.

First, I want to thank all the members who have reached out to me for an update in regard to my youngest son, Roch, who is doing exceptionally well now. He got through the rough stages of his confirmed case. He's going to have some lingering effects from COVID. He's still off work right now, but here's the fortunate thing: He's got sick days. His employer has been paying him through this whole process. So my son has the ability to stay at home, away from the workplace in a safe environment where he won't have to worry about his rent, his car payment, his utility bills and so on. That's what we're asking for in this motion on our opposition day today.

I also want to bring a discussion to the House in regard to my other son. His name is Matthieu. Now, Matthieu is one of those individuals who's strong-headed and has a different way with of thinking. But he and I have been connecting a little bit more, and I want to read a conversation that he and I have been having over the last couple of days. He starts out and says, “So how come” the Premier—because I can't say Ford, right? Okay. “So how come” the Premier “won't allow paid sick days, yet he's been on his third paid sick day so far this week? He sets all these rules, and then he just runs away and hides.”

At this point, I explained to him the reason why the Premier wasn't here this week because of a confirmed COVID case. I cannot share the comment that he just said; I can't share that one either. But he goes on to say, “Okay. I figured you had a long day in the session.” So he goes on to say, “I've seen this video last week of him and Andrea”—oh, sorry, “our leader”; can't say Andrea, right?—“going back and forth about paid sick days, and he had the audacity to stand there and say that she's making all of this up and embarrassing herself and the people she represents, and then he goes and hides, tries to give the cops more power and this shouldn't be allowed and uses paid sick days again.”

I explained again to my son the process as far as what's happening. He goes on further on the election: “When are we are going to have an opportunity to vote on these paid sick days?” I explained to him and said, “Unfortunately, the government is a majority government. The next time you're going to have an opportunity to exercise your right to vote will be in June 2022.” He says, “That can't come any time sooner.”

This is a conversation that I'm having in my household. I can tell you many other conversations that I've had with people across my riding.

Jessie Hennessey is a wonderful woman in Elliot Lake. She is the mother of a miracle baby in Elliot Lake; I've talked about Elijah's battle with his heart condition many times in this House. But she, as well, is upset in regard to why this government isn't responding and acting quickly with some of the public health units that are here in Toronto and Peel and the decisions that they've made in order to restrict and shut down the workplaces that have more than five COVID cases there. Why aren't they acting on the paid sick days?

This is what's happening outside of this House. We always think we're inside of this bubble and we know what's going on, but the real people, those who are out here, those who have heartbeats and those who are really focused on providing the care and are concerned and are frustrated with this government, that's what they are feeling.

This government needs to act. You've had the opportunity now to act. We've been raising the alarm bells. The health professionals have been raising the alarm bells. We have all been putting the same message to you, and now all of a sudden, there seems to be a crack in that door, and hopefully, there is going to be a light at the end of the tunnel for people across this province.

Do the right thing. Bring in paid sick days, and put that piece of legislation forward so we can move on it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: On Friday, when the Premier made the announcement of the response to the shocking projections that were outlined by the science advisory table, I have to say, I held my breath when I saw the Minister of Labour on the panel. I know that health care experts, medical professionals, ICU doctors, emergency room physicians, councillors, mayors, worker advocates across the province also held their breath, hoping that Friday would be the day that this government would finally respond to the countless calls from across the province for a program of paid sick leave. But instead, what we heard from the Minister of Labour on Friday was a proposal to shut down a small number of businesses that they considered non-essential and to introduce more inspections.

We know that, since the start of this pandemic, 46,000 COVID-19 related inspections have been conducted; 500 fines have been issued. Meanwhile, COVID cases are skyrocketing among essential workers. Workplace illnesses related to COVID-19: Last year, from March to December, there were 11,000 cases. By March—from January to March—in just three months of this year, there were almost 9,000 WSIB claims filed for workplace illnesses related to COVID-19.

Enforcement is a piece of the puzzle, but we need to take the actions that the experts have set out, and that includes paid sick days. It includes paid time to vaccinate. Those are the public health measures that are really going to make a difference and save workers' lives, and we know this.

Dr. Brown referred to the measures that were taken in the US between March and December last year. They provided two weeks of paid sick leave that was delivered by the employer to workers who needed to take time off work for COVID-related reasons, and they were able to take that time at full salary replacement. And what happened? Researchers have shown that it prevented as many as 15,000 COVID cases over the period that that wage replacement program of paid sick days was in place. The member for Burlington wants to talk about facts: That's a fact. The fact also is that 16 states in the US also have paid sick days, while the federal government has its own employer-provided paid sick day program. That is a fact. There are almost 50 counties and cities in the US that also have paid sick days. That is a fact.

The province can provide a provincial program of paid sick days at the same time that the federal government has its CRSB. We know all of the problems with the CRSB; they have been well documented. Workers aren't accessing it. It's too much of a risk. They don't know, if they stay home sick without pay and apply online for the program, if they will qualify. They can't afford to take the pay cut that would be involved from a benefit that pays less than minimum wage—if they end up being eligible. They have to have missed 50% of their regular workweek in order to qualify.

1650

We need a provincial program of paid sick days that is seamless, that is uninterrupted, that doesn't require workers to take a reduction of pay. That is what the essential workers who are most at risk of COVID-19 transmission need. Who are these essential workers? They are racialized. They are immigrants. They are low-wage workers. They take public transit to work. They live in dense neighbourhoods, often in multi-family dwellings. They are people who bag our groceries. They care for our seniors in long-term-care homes. They deliver our food. These are people that we rely on, and they deserve to have the protections that the researchers and the evidence show are necessary.

I call on this government to finally do the right thing: Pass this motion, bring in a program of paid sick days and protect essential workers in the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? I again recognize the leader of the official opposition.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thanks so much, Speaker. I appreciate that. I've got a couple of minutes, and I just want to remind people of how we got here.

After months and months and months of not listening to the experts, back on February 11, the Premier watched—as we all did—the science table's presentation showing that if the government opened up too soon and didn't put proper measures in place, we would be in a huge crisis right about now. In fact, Dr. Brown's presentation was blunt and it said this: "If public health measures are lifted, cases could rise dramatically depending on the spread of B.1.1.7," the variant of concern which is spreading. Of course, as we know, the very next day

measures were loosened, and we are in a pickle. We are in a very, very bad place.

At that time, everybody who watched the presentation was wondering why the Premier opened stuff up when he wasn't supposed to. One of the media folks actually asked at that press conference, to Dr. Brown: "Am I missing something here—or is this presentation actually predicting a disaster?" And Dr. Brown said, "No, I don't think you're missing anything. The cases will likely rise given the variants of concern."

The CBC then asked some of the other science table members, and said—asking Dr. Jüni: "If we do lift the restrictions and have kids back in school fully, are we going to be in lockdown again soon after that?" And Dr. Jüni said, "Yes." This was all back in February.

Other doctors and the Ontario Hospital Association said the same thing. "Today's reopening decision is shocking and confusing," said Anthony Dale from the Ontario Hospital Association. Another ER doctor, Dr. Michael Warner, said "Are we trying to fail?" back in February.

It was a bad, bad decision that the Ford government made and we are all living with the consequences—although some are living with the consequences and some are dying with the consequences. Some are suffering the consequences a lot worse than others.

On Friday, April 16, the Ford government again announced a series of measures that flew in the face of the advice of the science table. We're not talking anything but facts here, Speaker. I know that the Conservatives have this penchant for alternative facts. It happened in the States. We watched it all play out not too long ago. But these are the real facts, Speaker. These are real quotes.

The reaction to the decisions made on Friday, after a presentation again—they were stark. It started out with pure anger, when I watched the press conference, because there was the feeling that they might actually recognize who was actually getting sick from this, and dying from this. "They've done nothing to meaningfully protect them." That's Dr. Brooks Fallis. And I could go on.

On the paid sick days, the solution is clear. My colleague from London West has Bill 239. It should be supported by this government.

But look, here we are now. We're talking about the paid sick days that need to happen in this province. I just want to say that there are many, many people who agree. Of course, yesterday we heard again from the science table a rebuke, a stinging rebuke of the government, because they once again put the same recommendations forward yesterday that they had put forward on Friday to try to get this government to listen to what needs to be done to save people's lives, stop the spread of COVID-19 and save our health care system. But, of course, the government thus far has ignored them.

But here are the people, on paid sick days: Samantha Hill, president of the Ontario Medical Association; the Ontario Hospital Association; Dr. Lawrence Loh, as we know; Dr. Shanker Nesathurai from Haldimand-Norfolk, chief medical officer of health; Patrick Brown, mayor of Brampton; Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit;

Association of Local Public Health Agencies; Tara Kiran, family physician—the list goes on and on. The number of people telling this government what to do to save lives and stop the spread is ginormous.

They just have to listen and do right by the people of Ontario. Stop the suffering. Stop the pain. Stop the virus. Save our health care system. Respect our health care workers. Respect the experts who are advising you and who you're supposed to be listening to, because they're the ones with the facts, and everything that they have predicted thus far that the government simply ignored has come true. Absolutely everything that they advised the government to do and the government refused to do has resulted in us being walked right into this third wave. That's why I say it and I say it often: The government did this. The Premier did this with his eyes wide open, because he did have the facts.

So what do we want? Simply, easy-to-access paid sick days: no doctor's note, no application process, no waiting time—in other words, as my colleague said, no reduction in pay. What we need is a government that cares about its people to the point where it actually puts in place the public health measures necessary to keep them safe and to keep them alive. And those racialized workers and low-income workers deserve a government that gives a damn about them. Pass this motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Ms. Horwath has moved opposition day number four. 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 nays have it.

A recorded vote being required, the bells will ring for 30 minutes, during which time the members may cast their votes. Prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1658 to 1728.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I would ask the members to take their seats, please.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 15; the nays are 31.

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

Motion negatived.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member on a point of order.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Speaker, you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member is seeking unanimous consent to see the clock at 6 p.m. Agreed? Agreed.

1730

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

GREENBELT

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member to move your ballot item.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you, Speaker. Our green spaces, parks and—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. Just one moment. We need you to first of all move the motion of your PMB, please, and then we'll get you going.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thanks for the clarification, Speaker. I'm just in a little bit of a hurry, it seems.

My motion reads as follows: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should expand the greenbelt to further protect the province's environment, groundwater, and agricultural resources for future generations, including portions of the lands focused on the Paris Galt moraine.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I now recognize the member for Oakville North–Burlington to continue with debate.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Our green spaces, parks and conservation areas are the living, breathing hearts of our communities. In Oakville North–Burlington, we have the privilege to border on the protected lands in the greenbelt that surround the GTA. As MPP for Oakville North–Burlington, I remain steadfast in my commitment to protecting our province's vital green spaces, and I know that our Premier and government share this commitment.

From planting trees and rain gardens in our community to organizing litter cleanup in our local parks and roadways, I understand the importance of thinking globally and acting locally. That's why I've introduced this motion today to proclaim our support for the greenbelt, but also to call for its expansion to protect more environmentally sensitive lands for us and for future generations.

It's important to take a brief look at what the greenbelt is and what it does. The greenbelt includes over two million acres of land, and extends 325 kilometres from the eastern end of the Oak Ridges moraine near Rice Lake to the east, to the Niagara River in the west. It protects farmlands, forests, wetlands and watersheds. It preserves fresh air and clean water. It protects rural communities and offers people opportunities for recreation in the outdoors and tourism. It helps preserve animal and plant habitats and biodiversity. The greenbelt does many things to protect our environment, and that's why it is so important to people across Ontario. It's appropriate that we are debating my motion during Earth Week, with Earth Day following tomorrow.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs, when he launched this consultation in February, said, "This is truly a unique opportunity to grow the greenbelt and protect Ontario's environmental, groundwater and agricultural resources for future generations.... The Premier has been steadfast in his commitment to protect the greenbelt and our government will not consider any proposals to remove or develop any part of it."

We've asked the public to give advice on two key issues. The first is protecting the Paris Galt moraine, a glacial deposit of loose sediment and rock extending from Caledon to north of Paris and Brantford, which is home to critical groundwater resources. The second is adding,

expanding and further protecting urban river valleys in the areas around the Don River in Toronto and land around Duffins Creek in Ajax and Pickering.

Both of these proposals demonstrate the importance of the greenbelt in protecting not just land, but water. We must protect the groundwater that originates in moraines and the water courses themselves, and we must approach protection in a holistic way. One part of a healthy environment is dependent on other parts.

In my own community, the greenbelt protects important river valleys such as Fourteen Mile Creek and Sixteen Mile Creek, and it protects many others throughout the GTA. With our proposed greenbelt expansion, other urban river valleys could gain more protection after this consultation. I encouraged my constituents to take part and provide their comments online through the Environmental Registry. I wrote about the importance of this once-in-a-generation consultation in my local papers in March, and I've heard back from many who are interested in this outcome.

We are also putting financial resources into protecting the greenbelt, other green spaces, wetlands and water courses.

In February, the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks announced the government is investing \$12 million over the next three years as part of our continued support of the Greenbelt Foundation, to protect, promote and improve the greenbelt in the Golden Horseshoe region. Projects delivered through this funding will focus on planting trees to increase natural cover, enhancing recreational opportunities for people to experience nature, and maintaining and enhancing green infrastructure and climate resilience.

Last November, our government also created the Greenlands Conservation Partnership to help secure land of ecological importance and promote healthy, natural spaces. Through this partnership, we are investing \$20 million over the next four years to help Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Ontario Land Trust Alliance secure land across the province in order to protect and restore important areas such as wetlands, grasslands and forests.

In December, we announced \$30 million over five years to help conservation organizations restore and enhance important wetlands across Ontario. The new Wetlands Conservation Partner Program will focus on restoration projects in the Great Lakes watersheds and support municipalities with storm water management. In year 1, our government is partnering with Ducks Unlimited Canada to invest \$6 million to support more than 60 wetland projects in the Lake Ontario and Lake Erie watersheds and connected waterways. Wetlands are important for water quality and preserving and increasing habitats for endangered species.

All of these measures are part of our holistic approach, and they're also why we are investing \$7.5 million to improve the health of the Great Lakes, including \$5.8 million for 65 Great Lakes projects across the province to improve water quality and help address environmental

challenges impacting our Great Lakes, and \$1.67 million through the new Great Lakes Local Action Fund, created last year to support projects that protect and restore coastal areas of the Great Lakes, as well as the rivers and streams that flow into them. Through the Ontario Trillium Foundation, our government this year is also funding \$164,800 for the Halton Environmental Network and \$100,000 for Oakvillegreen to help protect our environment.

Ontario has a remarkable legacy of preserving and protecting our green spaces and the environment by governments of different stripes over many decades. The Niagara Escarpment Commission was set up in 1973 by Premier Bill Davis, one of our most esteemed and long-serving Premiers, to protect this unique and cherished escarpment. The escarpment itself was designated in 1990 as a UNESCO world biosphere reserve. This designation recognizes it as a nationally and internationally significant landform, one of 18 in Canada. It's also significant that the Ontario government recognized and protected the escarpment many years before its UN designation.

The Oak Ridges moraine to the north and east of the GTA was protected by Premier Mike Harris's government in 2001. It extends from Dufferin county in the far west to Northumberland county in the east. The remainder of the greenbelt lands were added by Premier Dalton McGuinty's government in 2005.

With the current consultation, we now have the opportunity to add the name of another Premier and government to the honourable role of protectors of green spaces in the province of Ontario. As a Progressive Conservative, I am proud that our government and party have led the way to protect Ontario's land, air and waters.

In 1999, Premier Mike Harris created 378 new parks and protected areas in Ontario, the largest increase in the province's history. The Ministry of the Environment itself is a legacy of Premier Davis, established in 1972. George Kerr, who represented the riding of Burlington in the Ontario Legislature, served as our province's first environment minister, and it was Premier George Drew's government in 1946 that passed the first Conservation Authorities Act, bringing together the province, municipalities and citizens to restore lands and water courses, to protect people from natural hazards such as flooding, and to improve the environment. The tradition of co-operation exists to this day, illustrated by the government asking Hassaan Basit, president and CEO of Conservation Halton, to lead a committee to provide advice to the government on conservation authorities.

1740

Protecting our environment and our greenbelt requires action by government, but nothing we do would work without the commitment of individuals and community organizations. In Halton region, we are fortunate to have dedicated volunteers working with groups such as Oakvillegreen, BurlingtonGreen and the Halton Environmental Network. I've worked with these groups, and I've personally led teams of volunteers planting trees and picking up litter in our parks and roadways. This is very much in the spirit of the Provincial Day of Action on

Litter, established by the member for Barrie–Innisfil, to highlight that we can all do our part, even close to home, to help protect our environment and keep it clean.

There are projects like these in my community and across the greenbelt. In every community, it's individuals who lead the way, identifying solutions for problems in our local environment, doing what needs to be done. My motion today encourages our provincial government to do its part, expand the greenbelt, protect more important lands from development and leave a legacy of a cleaner, greener natural environment for generations to come.

Let me end with a quote from Premier Bill Davis from 1973, speaking about the Niagara Escarpment: "I am sure that all members of the Legislature ... recognize the vital necessity of checking urban sprawl, of preserving community identity and of ensuring that there will always be sufficient green space among the grey."

I hope that members will support my motion today and will join me together to protect and expand our greenbelt. Let's preserve the green space among the grey.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd like to thank Ms. Triantafilopoulos, the member from Oakville North–Burlington, for your opening remarks. I just want to ensure that everyone is clearly aware that the opposition will now have up to 12 minutes, and independent members will have collectively five minutes for debate.

Therefore, further debate?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It is true: Millions of Ontarians rely on our greenbelt every day. The food we eat, the natural areas we enjoy and our economy all depend on the greenbelt, and it's not just the people; 40% of Ontario's species at risk, like the bald eagle, call the greenbelt home. We are stewards of these lands, and we must protect the greenbelt from generations of people to come.

While I support the sentiment of the member's words, I am more concerned with this government's complete lack of action. We are in a climate emergency and we need urgent action, yet in Ontario we don't have a climate change plan. This government, by their actions and legislation, has dragged us backwards and has caused reckless damage with their pro-development, anti-environment philosophy. Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker: No one trusts this government when it comes to the greenbelt.

Yes, expand the greenbelt, but also enhance protections. Municipalities like Waterloo have levels of protection that are higher than are currently in the Greenbelt Act, so any expansion must ensure that the highest level of protection will prevail. This provision is missing from the member's motion. We also need to support projects like the Cootes-to-escarpment park, which will connect protected areas and wetlands to form a natural corridor from Hamilton Harbour and Cootes Paradise to the Niagara Escarpment.

We also need an ambitious plan to protect precious farmland. The amazing folks at Plan B Organic Farms are winners of the Friend of the Greenbelt Award; they understand how important it is to protect the greenbelt, because they farm it every day. However, Drew Spoelstra,

who is the vice-president of the Ontario farmers' association and a constituent, warns us that Ontario is losing 175 acres of farmland a day.

Groundwater also needs to be protected, yet this government continues to allow corporations like Nestlé to profit from water extraction while many First Nations communities lack access to clean drinking water.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to share the words of Sarah Harmer. Sarah is a successful musician who is internationally respected for her tireless work to protect the greenbelt. She's also a recipient of the Friend of the Greenbelt Award. Sarah writes, "I speak for my parents, Isabelle and Alan Harmer, farmers and land stewards in Halton region since 1964, when I say that our government must uphold the highest environmental standards in the greenbelt, anything less would be an insult to those who have long cared for this land and its diverse species, and future generations who will need these healthy living systems to survive."

Mr. Speaker, it will take more than just words in this motion to expand the greenbelt. We need a commitment to action and public accountability to ensure that this is jewel is truly protected for the future generations.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise to speak in favour of expanding the greenbelt and especially protecting the Paris-Galt moraine, but I must say, Speaker, that if the members opposite were serious about this, they would immediately pass Bill 71, my private member's bill, the Paris Galt Moraine Conservation Act, and they would expand protection to other moraines in the region, such as the Waterloo and Orangeville moraines.

Secondly, if they were serious, they should follow the recommendations of the Crombie report about expanding the greenbelt to our urban river valleys, providing protection to the waterways that supply us with water and protect us from flooding.

I would, finally, recommend to the government that they examine my ERO submission on greenbelt expansion if they want a full look at how to truly expand the greenbelt to protect present and future generations.

I would respectfully ask the government, if they are truly serious about protecting and expanding the greenbelt, to protect the integrity of the greenbelt. How can they do that?

First, restore the ability of conservation authorities to use their science and evidence-based decision-making to protect our drinking water and protect us from flooding.

Second, cancel Highway 413 and the Holland Marsh highway, two 400-series highways that run through the greenbelt.

Third, revoke the extreme powers the government has granted the minister to overturn planning laws and environmental protections for development outside the greenbelt.

Speaker, those are the kinds of protections that are needed to protect the integrity of the greenbelt. I don't say this today to play politics. On the eve of Earth Day, we

need protections in place for our drinking water; we need protections in place for the farmland that supplies us with food, the wetlands that protect us from flooding and the green space that our children will enjoy for future generations.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I am pleased to join the debate on this motion because the greenbelt is much more than a provincially legislated land use plan; it's Ontario's solution for fresh air, clean water, climate resilience and a thriving economy with local food and healthy outdoor recreation for hard-working Ontario families. What's clear is that Premier Ford and his cabinet have been absolutely steadfast in their commitment to protect the greenbelt.

In the region of Durham, where I have the privilege of representing Whitby residents, the greenbelt helps make Durham a great place to live, work, play and do business. The greenbelt is home to rural and agricultural systems and resources, as well as thriving agri-business, conservation areas and recreational opportunities.

The consultation process that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing led is allowing us to also hear other voices with respect to protecting the greenbelt. One of those voices, for the record, is the Greenbelt Foundation. The Greenbelt Foundation says that they're looking forward "to working with the government and key stakeholders to realize a vision of meaningful growth and enhancement that benefits Ontarians."

They went on further to say, "By announcing its intention to expand the greenbelt's" protections, "the province has indicated"—and this is an important distinction—"an important path forward for extending and enhancing the unique benefits of the greenbelt." They went on further to say that they welcome that discussion and look forward, as we do, to finding ways to build on the greenbelt's history of long-standing success. Our leadership continues in protecting the greenbelt.

1750

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Burch: It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to motion 151. The protection and expansion of the greenbelt is an issue people in Ontario are deeply passionate about, and I have no reason to question the member's passion about it. However, it's difficult to take this bill at face value because of the fact that her government has proposed the destruction of a number of Ontario's green spaces. Not even a month ago, this government announced the GTA West highway, a project that would create a new 400-series highway that runs through parts of the existing greenbelt.

This government has used ministerial zoning orders, MZOs, a controversial tool that bypasses public consultation and fast-tracks development at an unprecedented rate. In Duffins Creek, they approved an MZO to build a warehouse on a wetland. In Simcoe, this government approved an MZO to create an automotive innovation park and car-testing facility within an environmental protection

area. In Whitchurch-Stouffville, this government approved an MZO on the outside border of the greenbelt and within the Oak Ridges moraine. In Stratford, an MZO endangered valuable farmland. In Vaughan, this government approved an MZO for a Walmart that requires the loss of three provincially significant wetlands. In Toronto, this government attempted to use an MZO to demolish a heritage building in the middle of the night.

Speaker, these are just a handful of the over 38 MZOs issued. At least 19 of them benefit Ontario Progressive Conservative donors. An analysis by Canada's National Observer found that nine of the MZOs were for developers who donated a total of over \$250,000 to the Ontario PCs and Ontario Proud.

Ontario Nature, Environmental Defence and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture have all spoken out about this government's use of MZOs that threaten our environment, farmland and treaties with First Nations. In response to the growing chorus of criticism, the Premier said, "We will never stop issuing MZOs," and then used Bill 257, a bill touted as helping municipalities, to amend the Planning Act to exempt MZOs from the most basic planning principles.

This government has been in the business of finding and creating new ways to abuse our environment in the name of development. Greenbelt expansion is welcome, but I have little faith that this is anything other than a weak attempt to avoid the consequences of their disastrous environmental record, a record that the Premier has been very clear they plan to continue. Not just today, but every day should be a day when we commit ourselves to protecting the greenbelt upon which our health and economic sustainability depend.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: I want to rise and commend the member for this motion.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I've been lectured a lot about working from the inside to make change and to have your voice heard, and I must say, I haven't been able to figure out how. You see, for a long time, I thought perhaps winning a nomination and being elected to the Legislature as part of a governing party and caucus meant you would have your voice heard, but as this government has shown us, it doesn't allow you to work from the inside, as one might say.

I thought that perhaps spending \$300 and asking other Ontarians and party members of the government to attend a policy convention and vote might allow voices to be heard, but alas, that also wasn't the way, as policies at a policy convention don't matter to this government or its political party, because if you're able to somehow evade voter fraud and win a vote, election or policy, you still can't influence anything with the governing party or the government from the inside.

I started to think that maybe the only way to influence was hiring the lobbyist friends of the government, but alas, the honourable member from Guelph has shown me another way. You see, if you are a leader of a political

party whose mandate is in stark contrast to the mandate of the members of the governing party and you get elected into the Legislature, this motion shows that the government will copy your ideas. This motion to expand the greenbelt in my riding and many other ridings comes from a government that calls itself Progressive Conservative, but it is actually an idea from the Green Party, Mr. Speaker.

The member from Guelph championed this idea, and he didn't have to be elected into the government caucus, where your voice really doesn't matter. He didn't have to conduct voter fraud or evade voter fraud in a nomination of the governing party. He didn't even have to attend a policy convention. No, he became the leader of the Green Party of Ontario, and that is what this government respects: the ideas not from its own caucus or its own party members, but the ideas from the other parties in this Legislature.

A couple of additional points: It is interesting this motion calls for increasing the greenbelt from the government that did away with community consultation, specifically the construction of a massive storage facility in my riding in the village of Blair, and a government that is building a new highway on the greenbelt in other ridings. So they want to increase the greenbelt in my riding while they are building a highway on parts of the greenbelt in other ridings. It seems a contradiction to me, or perhaps this government isn't sure which direction it wants to go on the greenbelt, just as it has shown us on a variety of different files.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure to stand here today and speak on behalf of the private member's motion tabled by the member from Oakville North–Burlington. Speaker, even though the greenbelt doesn't touch my riding of Sarnia–Lambton, this is an issue that has the attention of a lot of my constituents. When we discuss the issue of the greenbelt, the constituents are very pleased to hear that our government is listening to the people of Ontario.

The member from Oakville–Burlington talked about the past history of the Conservative Party, as far back as George Drew, Leslie Frost, William Davis, establishing different parts of the Niagara Escarpment. I remember the first chairman of that, the Honourable Jimmy Allan, who went on from government service to head up the Niagara Escarpment Commission.

Again, those constituents have been very pleased to learn that in February, our government announced a 60-day consultation with the people of Ontario on how to best grow the greenbelt and help protect more of the province's natural environment. Our government launched consultations in order to gather the best ideas and information on how to protect farmlands, forests, wetlands and watersheds from future development. As a government, we have a tremendous opportunity to grow the greenbelt and protect Ontario's environmental, groundwater and agricultural resources for future generations. It's something I think we should be doing, and I want to commend the

member from Oakville North–Burlington for tabling this motion seeking the support of this Legislature for expanding the greenbelt. On this issue, it's important that we all agree on the importance of the greenbelt.

Mr. Speaker, this is really a sensible motion, something that I know constituents in my riding with an interest in this issue would like to see supported by all members of the Legislature. Our government has always worked hand in hand with local municipalities to ensure that growth is supported in the right areas without jeopardizing important resources like farmland, forests, wetlands and watersheds.

Our government has shown that we are strong stewards of the environment through our actions to date. We recently announced that we are investing \$20 million over the next four years in the Greenlands Conservation Partnership to help secure land of ecological importance. This funding would help Rice Lake Plains Natural Area, the Alfred Bog, the Saugeen Bruce Peninsula Natural Area and what's called the Frontenac Arch. These investments reflect a key commitment by our government in the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan and increase the number of conserved natural spaces for the public to enjoy.

Our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan is a living document, and that is why we'll continue to evolve our plan to reflect the feedback we are receiving from the people of Ontario. We will continue to engage and consult with the public, stakeholders, Indigenous communities and other levels of government on the evolution of this Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan to ensure we continue to build on our progress.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, there are a number of constituents in my riding of Sarnia–Lambton who are very interested in the success and growth of the greenbelt. When I speak with them, they continue to be pleased to see how our government is respecting the greenbelt and taking real action to learn how we can grow the greenbelt and expand environmental protections, while at the same time support our continued economic growth in this province.

I will be supporting this motion. I also urge all members of the Legislature to also support this motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Joel Harden: I'm glad to see this motion before us this afternoon. I think it's great. I know MPP Triantafilopoulos from the social policy committee, and I'm glad to see an advocate for green spaces in the government caucus.

I just want to, in the small amount of time I have this afternoon, recount a story to the member that really impacted me. About two years ago this time, we had some historic floods in our community that impacted Cumberland and Constance Bay. The debate we had at that time was how important it was for us to protect the conservation authorities. We know we've had that discussion in this chamber, where the government proposed some significant changes to the way conservation authorities work to prevent issues like flooding.

1800

I want to recount to the member a conversation I had with an army official who was there, organizing teams of soldiers, going to door to door, sandbagging people's homes that were either already underwater or almost underwater. He pulled me aside and said, "Mr. Harden, I'm going to speak to you about politics, and normally, soldiers don't do that. I'm going to tell you something: Any time a government calls us to help, we're going to be there. But you have a bigger fight, and it's with people who don't take climate change seriously. You have a bigger responsibility: to tell folks who want to do certain kinds of development or certain kinds of energy production—it's on you to say no; it's on you to convince people in governments to say no. I'm a soldier. I'm not a politician. I'm here, and I'll always be here, but to be very honest, I shouldn't have to be here. We should have protections against things like this, and it's on your profession to do something about it. Thank you for talking to me. I'm going to go about my work." He left an impression on me, and I want to remember him in this space.

To my friend who is inspired to expand the greenbelt: I think this is a piece of the puzzle, a part of the mitigation strategy, but we have other, bigger battles to fight on energy generation and on proper development, to make sure we do the right thing by the people who keep us safe.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: I rise today to speak in support of motion 151, brought forward by my colleague from Oakville North–Burlington. To summarize: Motion 151 proposes that our government expand the greenbelt to further protect Ontario's precious environment, groundwater and agricultural resources for future generations. The proposed area of the expansion includes portions of land located in the Paris-Galt moraine. I wholeheartedly support this motion, and I thank the member for Oakville North–Burlington for raising this issue in the House.

I know how important it is to preserve the green spaces in this great province we call home, not only for ourselves, as we face the challenges of climate change, but also for future generations. I want my kids and, someday, my grandkids to grow up and thrive in Ontario, which right now is taking steps to ensure our greenbelt is preserved and expanded, as we are doing with the Paris-Galt moraine.

For my family and many families living in the GTA, our green spaces are very important—as a result of how much development has happened here over the years, as people come and settle in this area for work and better opportunities for their families and careers.

The environmental, social and economic benefits associated with the greenbelt are incalculable and countless but include providing all Ontarians with fresh air and clean water, local food and drink, and protection of agricultural lands, outdoor recreation and tourism experiences, climate change mitigation and resilience and flood mitigation, important habitat and biodiversity, and maintenance of rural communities.

Speaker, Ontario is a great province that is a wonderful place to live and work, and the greenbelt is an integral part of keeping our province's environment, agriculture and many other related sectors, such as recreation and tourism, healthy and thriving for future generations.

Once we are out of lockdown, I hope that we may all return to safely enjoying the wide open spaces of Ontario and get back to exploring all the natural charm and beauty this province has to offer.

I'm pleased that this motion is seeking to expand the greenbelt so that we may count on this vital ecosystem remaining accessible to us and our kids and their kids.

Speaker, I can't say enough how happy I am to see the expansions of the greenbelt taking place.

I fully support this motion, and I thank again the member for Oakville North–Burlington for bringing this forward. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: The day before Earth Day, I am pleased to be able to add my voice to the conversation about expanding the greenbelt and to speak about the motion that the government has put forward. I'm glad any time to speak about environmental protections and about the scientific understanding of what that means and what we need to do better.

We're hearing a lot that sort of sounds like a bumper sticker, the "I heart the Greenbelt" message today—which has its place. We want everyone to support the greenbelt and support the charm and beauty, as we've heard, of Ontario. I paddleboard, Speaker. I love lakes and rivers and enjoying nature, just like the rest of us. But I love the ugly places too, like the wetlands, the places that don't actually attract tourists but get the job done, filter our water, make sure that we have what we need in terms of healthy animals, water—all of that. They do the heavy lifting.

I'm going to remind folks that standing here, not too long ago, I was defending the Duffins Creek provincially significant wetlands. My colleague from Niagara Centre eloquently listed a handful of devastating MZOs and decisions that are not just targeting but are demolishing protected wetlands, protected environmental spaces, and that is important to bear in mind.

I see this motion as part of an important conversation, but I also see it as a public relations exercise in damage control, especially because I know that people in my neck of the woods and across Ontario are seething about the powers that this government has given themselves and the minister when it comes to minister's zoning orders, or MZOs, and that supercharged MZO power they've given themselves to bypass process, run roughshod and basically leave out public consultation or environmental protections.

I want to thank First Nations activists, conservation authorities, advocates, environmental groups, farmers and just folks who have been nonstop around the clock having to stand up to defend our environment from this government and for the future.

So while this motion, of course, has merit, and we're always glad to see further protection, as it says, of the province's environment, groundwater and agricultural resources of future generations specific to the greenbelt, any greenbelt expansion plans should enhance existing protections and not diminish them. Cambridge and Waterloo are on record as saying that their current protections are stronger than what the government is proposing. So I hope the government is factoring that in. Where it's good, don't make it bad. Where you have protections, factor them in.

I spoke a bit about Duffins Creek, and I still remember the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, who is in charge of the provincial flooding strategy—it was his signature to give the order to pave that wetland. How on earth do those priorities reconcile? I don't understand. I think that that is sort of how I see this government: On the one hand, we've got have the "I heart the Greenbelt" bumper sticker; on the other, you've got the Upper York Sewage Solutions project. I don't care who has a cottage where. You want to run a sewage pipeline cutting through the Oak Ridges moraine to the Duffin Creek Water Pollution Control Plant, cutting through that huge chunk of land, and you've moved it from the ministry of conservation into municipal affairs and housing. Reconcile that.

Highway 413—bad idea. Leave the farmland alone. Protect if you mean it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

The member now has two minutes for final comments.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to thank all of my colleagues who have joined in the debate today: the members for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Guelph, Whitby, Niagara Centre, Cambridge, Sarnia—Lambton, Ottawa Centre, Mississauga East—Cooksville, and Oshawa.

From your remarks today, I believe we are all committed in a common cause in this debate, and it is to protect our green spaces, farmland, forests, lands and streams. Ontario has truly a remarkable record of protecting and conserving our lands, stretching back to the foundation of conservation authorities, 75 years and beyond.

My motion today calls on our government to extend and increase greenbelt protection to more lands in Ontario, to the Paris Galt moraine, stretching from north of Paris and Brantford to Caledon, and to more of our urban river valleys in the GTA, which are not just waterways but

green lungs in our communities. Together we can act as good environmental stewards for the people of Ontario.

Extending the protected lands in the greenbelt will leave a legacy we can pass on to the next generation. It respects the wishes of our constituents who want to see that these lands are protected, and it honours the thousands of volunteers and dozens of community groups who have worked tirelessly to preserve the environment through individual actions, planting trees, repairing streams and working together to encourage governments to act. We honour the pioneers of the environmental and conservation movements who built up a legacy of protection that we benefit from today.

I thank you all for participating in this debate, and I ask you for support for this important motion. Thank you.

And Speaker, before I actually sit down, I just wanted to clarify that I may have read my motion a little differently than what is written so I wanted to ensure that the written text is the version that stands.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): There was a little bit of time left on the government side for actual debate, because you had up to 12 minutes. I had made the comment that, well, you have up to two minutes; you had more than that. Now you could have, if you choose, an additional two minutes, as laid out in the guidelines. If you have anything further you would like to comment on, we will give you up to two minutes to do so.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you, Speaker. The hour is late, and I'd be happy to leave it at that today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. All right. Well, the time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Ms. Triantafilopoulos has moved private member's motion of notice number 151. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. All right. I wasn't sure.

Interjection: Carried.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. You don't have to. Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, the House now stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1813.

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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	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
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
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Park, Lindsey (PC)	Durham	
Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Phillips, Rod (PC)	Ajax	
Piccini, David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie, du Développement du Nord et des Mines Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa- Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associé délégué au dossier des Petites Entreprises et de la Réduction des formalités administratives Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA) / Ministre associée des Transports (RGT) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Walker, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Associate Minister of Energy / Ministre associé de l'Énergie Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakubski, Hon. / L'hon. John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Yurek, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Donna Skelly
Teresa J. Armstrong, Toby Barrett
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto
Randy Hillier, Jane McKenna
Judith Monteith-Farrell, Michael Parsa
Randy Pettapiece, Donna Skelly
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Amarjot Sandhu
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeremy Roberts
Ian Arthur, Stan Cho
Catherine Fife, Mitzie Hunter
Logan Kanapathi, Sol Mamakwa
David Piccini, Jeremy Roberts
Amarjot Sandhu, Dave Smith
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Présidente: Goldie Ghamari
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Mike Schreiner
Jill Andrew, Robert Bailey
Guy Bourgouin, Stephen Crawford
Goldie Ghamari, Chris Glover
Mike Harris, Sheref Sabawy
Amarjot Sandhu, Mike Schreiner
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

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, Gurratan Singh
Nina Tangri, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Kaleed Rasheed
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Rima Berns-McGown, Michael Coteau
Faisal Hassan, Logan Kanapathi
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**

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