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Jeudi
22 avril 2021

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 22 April 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 22 avril 2021

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1800

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

PAID PERSONAL EMERGENCY LEAVE
NOW ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 VISANT À ACCORDER
SANS DÉLAI UN CONGÉ D'URGENCE
PERSONNELLE PAYÉ

Mr. Coteau moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill 247, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to personal emergency leave /
Projet de loi 247, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé d'urgence personnelle.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I turn to the member.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I'd like to thank members in the Legislature today for this opportunity to speak to this very important bill. This bill is pretty simple. What it's asking members of the Legislature to do is to agree on 10 paid sick days. That's it; that's how simple this bill is.

The reason I brought this forward as a bill was because I believe—and I was listening to experts out there, to politicians, to people responsible for public health, and just the general public. People were out there saying that one of the ways we can fight COVID-19 is to actually put in place a sick day program here in Ontario.

It has been such a difficult year for people in Ontario and across this country and around the world. We've seen over a million people in this country infected with COVID-19 and we've seen almost 24,000 people pass away because of it. In Ontario, the numbers have been difficult, as well. It has impacted communities in many different ways—the separation of family; it has impacted the economy. There have been impacts that have acted differently in rural Ontario and urban Ontario. In communities like mine, where there's high density, it has impacted communities differently. I would say, at the end of the day, I have never experienced anything like this as an Ontarian, and our province hasn't experienced anything like this.

I just want to say to the families out there who have lost loved ones or to people who have fallen ill, to people who have been impacted because of the impact on the economy, I believe—I have to believe—that every single

member in this House is feeling for you. I know we, as Liberals, here in the corner of the Legislature, are going to continue to fight for the people of Ontario to make sure that they get the right type of legislation put in place to protect them. That's why we're fighting for sick days here in Ontario.

I also wanted to thank my colleagues who are with me today and our leader, Steven Del Duca, who has been out there fighting across the province, talking to people about paid sick days. They're working night and day to try to convince this government to move forward on this bill.

There is no question that this has been a challenging time for the people of Ontario, but it has also been a challenging time for governments. It doesn't matter where you are—you could be in Australia, in the UK, anywhere in Canada—governments have had challenges. And this government, of course, had challenges.

Just over a year ago, when COVID-19 started to present itself in Ontario, we all took a step back and we said to ourselves that we were going to do everything we could to enable this government to be successful, regardless of political party. The bantering stopped. The heckling stopped. We took a step back and we said, "What can we do, Premier, to support you and to support your government so we can support the people of Ontario?" Every single politician in this Legislature had that tone, and we sat back and waited to see what the Premier was going to do.

There were some pretty simple things that he needed to do. Number one was reduce classroom sizes—it was a simple thing for us: Just reduce classroom sizes. We presented arguments about more testing, rapid testing, investments into health care, into nurses, personal support workers. There were a lot of different suggestions that were coming from the opposition.

Of course, my colleague from London West even presented a bill asking for sick days, which this government turned down. In fact, over the course of the last few months, there have been 19 attempts, either through motions or bills—19 times the Premier has been asked to support paid sick days, and 19 times he said no. It's astonishing.

The Premier presents an argument that he's there for the people and he's there to champion what they need, and he has failed on that. It's a big difference today—the tone, and how the people of Ontario feel about this government—compared to July 11, 2018, in front of this Legislature, when the front lawn was full and people were clapping. They were so happy that this Premier was elected. They felt that he had their back.

Here we are, three years later, going through the biggest challenge ever. Some 83% of Ontarians say that they support paid sick days, and this Premier has turned his back on those people, on Ontarians. Yes, there have been challenging times, but make no mistake: The people of Ontario, the people in opposition, people who are doctors, people at the scientific table—everyone has made every single suggestion. He has had all the resources and suggestions to make the right decision.

I want to tell you a little bit about sick days here in the province of Ontario. Some 42% of people have sick days, so the majority of Ontarians don't have them. Here's another interesting fact: If you're making under \$25,000 in this province, there's a 70% chance that you don't have paid sick days.

We have presented every single opportunity to this government to try to make the change necessary, to do the right thing, and we've proposed lots of different solutions.

The thing is, it's hard for us to understand, in the Legislature, on this side of the House—and I'm sure the backbenchers in government, as well: Why wouldn't this Premier actually implement a program to protect people? Why would he prefer to let people go back to work when they're sick so they can pay their bills? The only conclusion I have is—and I have heard this many times out in the public—it's because of his ideology. This Premier believes that nothing in life is free. He sees this as a giveaway—why should government be paying people to stay home, for not doing work? I believe that's what has been fuelling the Premier's decision over the last several months not to go forward in this direction.

But something happened a few days ago. The Premier was probably sitting in a room at a big table with different Conservative operatives, different pollsters and people who provide him with information. They presented a picture to him. They said to the Premier, "You have to understand that the majority"—more than the majority; 83%—"of Ontarians disagree with you on this, like they disagreed with you on just randomly carding people, like they disagreed with stopping letting kids play in parks." And the Premier, for some reason, had a complete change of heart. He has decided—two days ago, actually—that they're going to put in place some type of program to support paid sick days. We don't know what it is. But there was a tipping point here in this province where the people rallied up against this Premier and this government, and said, "Enough is enough. Start to use some logic. Start to use your head here a bit. When you're sending people into workplaces who are sick, they're getting other people sick."

Do you know the Premier is focused on international travel, which represents 1% of spread—don't get me wrong; you should focus on that, but the majority of spread is happening in our communities and in our workplaces. When you have to go to work and you have to decide between paying those bills and staying home and being safe, and if you don't go to work, you're not going to get paid and your kids are not going to eat—most Ontarians would put their family first, their children first. The Premier can't figure this out.

So the government scrambled. They ran everywhere. They didn't know what to do. After literally months of people asking questions in this Legislature, his science table providing the best advice, doctors from all across the province providing the best advice, everyone who knows anything about the subject matter providing the same advice, the Premier put in place a program. The Premier decided, last minute, that he's going to do it. Can you imagine? A year later—one of the best ways to stop COVID-19, one of the best ways you could actually put a stop to spread, and the Premier decided a year later to put in place a program. But we don't even know what that program is going to look like. I asked the government earlier today, I asked the minister on Monday: What is this program going to look like? Is it going to be 10 days? What's going—no answer.

1810

They have a very simple option right now: There's a bill here on the floor of the Ontario Legislature that they can actually vote on. I'm appealing to the government and the backbenchers—not the ones who are compelled by government, by cabinet, to follow the direction of Doug Ford—to do what your communities want you to do. How can you go back into your communities and look people in the eyes and say, "I voted against 10 paid sick days"? How can you do that?

It was interesting today—and this is all about the government scrambling again. The government came out today and they put out a press release from the Premier's office, and the Premier's office had my name on it—it was just an hour ago—saying that Michael Coteau's bill is forcing employers to pay for these sick days. Not once have I ever said that. In fact, when I was with the chamber of commerce, I said government should take on the costs because businesses have had too much pressures already because of the neglect of this government. I was very straightforward from the beginning that this would be paid for by government. Yet this government is scrambling. They don't know which direction to go to. They're like a spinning top, they just—in every single direction. They don't know when to stop and actually put in place a plan.

So I've given them a solution. The member from London West gave them a solution—19 opportunities in this House to put a solution forward, and this government has failed.

I want to speak to the members of the Legislature here, all members of the Legislature; there's only a few of us left here. You have an opportunity to do something right. This is a bill that will not be a burden to businesses because government will pay for it. Do the right thing and stand up for the men and women and families here in Ontario that brought you into this Legislature. Support the sick days that are necessary, and let's finish this. Let's get rid of COVID-19 in Ontario. Let's get it out of here. We can't continue to move forward if we're going to sit in this Legislature and you're given 19 opportunities to do something and every single time you say no. It's unacceptable. You're not going to hear it just from me. I don't vote for you because I'm not in your community.

You're going to hear it next time your name is on a ballot and people realize you did the wrong thing.

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

Ms. Jane McKenna: I want to first start off today—I sat as opposition from 2011 to 2014. Your job, as opposition, is to hold the government to account, which everybody in here knows. So I have won and lost, and believe me, the latter wasn't great, but I can tell you this: The one thing I did not miss when I was no longer here in this beautiful House was the fact of grandstanding and saying things and saying you're working for your constituents when the reality is—this is what your constituents want. Your constituents want that if you're talking about paid sick days, which everyone in here knows, paid sick days have, for 81 years—I've said this numerous times as I spoke about this yesterday. Paid sick days—for 81 years, has been all-party support that the federal government takes care of that.

So we sat in here day after day—I know the Premier, I know the Minister of Labour went numerous times to the federal government, and they championed for the people of Ontario. When there were 12 to 14 days when people weren't receiving their paid sick days, they made sure that it went to three to five—direct payment. Then again, people of Ontario, our constituents, came to us again, and they were saying 10 days—they wanted it to go to 20. Our Premier went to bat, with the minister and our government, to make sure that that happened.

We have a responsibility to the people in our constituencies to make sure that they get the tools they need to succeed. Everyone in this whole place knows that. That's your job—to make sure that your constituents succeed and that you have their voice moving forward.

I spoke on this yesterday, but I want to say a couple of things. Listening to the member across from Don Valley East about what he's bringing forward here today, if he's there for his constituents to make sure that they get the tools that they need to succeed—when I looked on michaelcoteau.onmpp.ca, just like I did for andreaorwath.ca and I looked for maritstiles.ca, there wasn't one link to go to paid sick days; not one.

My responsibility to my constituents is to give them every link that is possible for them to succeed. I've had numerous calls at my constituency office—I will give you an example from driving in here today. Everyone in here gets calls from everybody. His name is Jim. He said to me, “Jane, I'm heartbroken that there are no paid sick days. I'm heartbroken that I'm watching on the news every two minutes throughout the day and they're talking about the fact that these people are struggling—14.4 million people in Ontario are struggling because there's nowhere for them to get paid sick days.” So I said to him, “Jim, just so that we're extremely clear: It's unfortunate when the information is not brought forward properly.” I explained to him that that's your responsibility, as an MPP, to be able to do that.

As of right now, there's \$685 million that's still sitting with the federal government for paid sick days. So how is

it that we are not giving these people—or I am; I know the people on this side are—the tools and the information that they need to be able to get that information, so they have the tools to succeed with what they're trying to do?

I think the thing that bothers me the most is that it's so frustrating for people, when there's enough misinformation out there, that they cannot count on their MPP to guide them in the way that they need to get the tools that they need.

All of us in here know—all of us—that for 81 years, the federal government has always done paid sick days. There isn't one other province or one other territory that has ever stepped up to the plate to do that—except that prior to the federal government for the pandemic for the paid sick days, there was Quebec and Saskatchewan, but as soon as the federal government came forward with it, they stopped.

Speaker, I know how hard the member for Don Valley East has been working over the past few weeks since the March 31 launch of his campaign for the federal nomination in his riding. If he wins the nomination, he will be the candidate for the Trudeau Liberals in the upcoming federal election. We all know that many of the Prime Minister's top advisers, staff, MPs and two cabinet ministers served in the governments of Premiers McGuinty and Wynne.

Knowing how close these relationships are between the provincial and federal Liberal parties, Speaker, through you to the member for Don Valley East, I have a simple question, yes or no: Did the member for Don Valley East, at any time, ask the Prime Minister or any of his friends in the federal Liberal government to fix the gaps, to improve the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit which provides paid sick days to all Canadians across the country?

The reason I say that is because we heard the Premier come out and have a conversation—obviously, he's not here because of someone in his staff who, sadly, got COVID-19. But when he was out there speaking today, he recognized that there are gaps, because the federal government, with \$100 billion new spending money—we have all been talking about paid sick days and what needed to be done.

We were grateful for the 12 to 14 days going down to three to five, and we were grateful that it went from 10 to 20, but we all know that there had to be other provisions made. Of course, that wasn't done, so we as a province—because the Minister of Labour was the first out to do job-protected leave, and the first out to close schools to protect educators, to protect students and all the people who are working in the schools. We have done a province-wide lockdown. We were the first ones, even though airports are a federal jurisdiction, to make sure that people were coming in safely. The province stepped in because the federal government hadn't for rapid testing for the pilot project there. We knew that we had a responsibility, because that's our job as government.

1820

I'll just quote, listening to the Premier this morning—he said, “I've done my absolute best. I've put my heart and

soul into keeping that commitment, to protect, support and guide this province through some of the darkest days in our history, to never stop working until we've put this pandemic behind us forever."

I know, Madam Speaker, every person sitting here in this chamber knows how difficult this has been. Every one of us knows it changes constantly.

I'll tell you one thing: You look at people who send me things on a regular basis—and I'm sure other people get it—mean-spirited people who say things to you, which is exhausting and hurtful. But you have to understand, too, that we're here because we need to do what's best. Every one of us has five minutes of truth at the end of the day. Every one of us knows what we do to help our constituents—because we all got into this for the exact same reason.

When you watch things that are happening right now, and because things are so fluid all the time with what's happening—I've said this numerous times: I want to say about all my five kids, I get my self-worth when I look into their eyes. They're the reason I get up every day, because it's their next generation moving forward. I want to make sure they have all of that.

I do know that we have a responsibility to let our constituents have all the tools that they need to succeed. I know it's a very challenging time. It's a very difficult time for all of us with what we're going through with this pandemic.

My daughter, as I've mentioned before, is a nurse at Windsor Regional Hospital. I just talked to her before I came in here today. We were talking about how difficult it is. Her comment was—there was a nurse on Facebook and she was saying, "We're no longer the front line. You people are the front line. We're your last line when you get in here and you're sick."

We understand the frustration. We all get calls from all kinds of people. I just had a call from one of my constituents about going back to golf. We get it. It has been a trying year for everybody. We're trying to do the best we can to mitigate that. But we have to steward ourselves, because May 20 will come, and if not everybody takes care and stewards themselves—because we are the front line—this isn't going to stop on May 20.

You look at the international travel, you look at how many"—36 people, I think, brought it in yesterday. The Premier has said numerous times that the variant and COVID-19 didn't swim across the ocean. They got here because of the situation of international travel, people coming back and forth.

We talk about the vaccines and how we need them to get into arms. My daughter said to me the other day, "Mum, we're packed in ICU." Someone came up to her and said, "If I have a heart attack today and I can't get in and I die, well, that's life." But the lady said that because she's not in that position right now. If she were in that position, she wouldn't feel that way—if she was lined up in an ambulance and she couldn't get into a hospital.

I want to thank all of the people, all front-line workers—VV, who gives me Tim Hortons in the morning—every single person who has been out on the front line.

Unless it impacts you, people don't really believe that things are as bad as they are. We all hear there are people who think it's a conspiracy. We hear people saying, "We're not doing enough. We should have done this." Everybody's an armchair quarterback. I've been an armchair quarterback throughout this.

I'll tell you, all three levels of government have worked extremely hard for the people of Burlington to give them the tools that they need. That's our responsibility. I know at Joseph Brant Hospital, they're at 91%. They've got 33 people in there right now with COVID-19.

We need to support the people who are there and steward ourselves to make sure this doesn't continue on, so on May 20, we can all move forward, get on to the next phase of this and put this behind us, instead of talking about whatever was going on in the past. We can't move forward if we're not looking ahead, if we're always looking in the rear-view mirror.

I reach out to everybody today to say, we have a responsibility to steward ourselves. Please, let's all work together so we can get this behind us.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I thank the member for tabling this legislation once again calling on the government to enact paid sick days in Ontario. Based on the government's response, it has certainly hit a nerve.

Speaker, as well, last December, the member for London West tabled the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act. This legislation followed the advice of public health experts who had been sounding the alarm throughout the pandemic of the need for paid sick days for all workers. On March 1, more than two weeks after Ontario's science advisory table released modelling data that predicted the crisis we now find ourselves in and recommended paid sick days as one measure that could help to slow down the spread, the government voted it down.

Ontario is now in the midst of a third wave of this pandemic. As we speak, there are more than 2,000 people in the hospital with COVID-19. As of last night, 790 Ontarians were in intensive care units and 566 were unable to breathe without a ventilator. Yesterday, 32 more Ontarians were lost to COVID-19. These numbers have been rising daily.

The situation is so dire right now that patients are being transported hundreds of kilometres away because of a shortage of ICU beds.

And now this government is begging other provinces for front-line health care workers and other resources here in Ontario because they refused to listen to public health experts—experts like Dr. Steini Brown, the co-chair of the science advisory table, who warned us on February 11, one day before the Premier lifted public health measures in much of the province, that if these measures were lifted, variant cases and ICU admissions would rise.

Not only did Dr. Brown and other public health experts predict this crisis, they also told this government what it needed to do to slow it down. One of those measures was to implement a paid sick day program. Not only has the

Premier refused to do this, he won't even give essential workers paid time off to get vaccinated.

Nowhere has this pandemic been felt harder than in communities like mine in northwest Toronto, which are home to a large number of low-income essential workers. Many of these workers identify as Black, Indigenous or from other racially marginalized backgrounds, who throughout the pandemic have accounted for more than two thirds of all COVID-19 cases in Toronto, despite making up just over half of the city's population.

Last summer, the Premier expressed his opposition to any paid sick day program, saying, "I don't support it. We have legislation that protects jobs that people ... if they don't feel safe, they don't have to go to work."

I want to share the story of a member of my community who has felt the brunt of not having paid sick days. On March 20, Samuel's story was featured on the front page of the Toronto Star, and I want to share it in this chamber. It took courage to tell it. Samuel is a temporary worker who worked sanitizing buses and trains at night. Two weeks in, he developed a fever and a headache. In the Toronto Star article, Jennifer Yang wrote: "He used Ontario's online self-assessment form, which delivered its prognosis: the symptoms were consistent with COVID-19 and he should self-isolate for 14 days." Confused and stressed, he was not sure whether he could properly isolate as he was staying at a church. Samuel, still on probation, wasn't eligible for paid sick leave. He decided to isolate, but due to systemic and bureaucratic barriers, he lost his job sanitizing buses and trains as a result. He lost his job because he decided not to go to work sick.

Samuel, since then, began working as a PSW. The article goes on to say that at this job the risk of COVID-19 remained a source of stress for him. "He fretted over how he would self-isolate in a home shared with six others," including a baby, "and the financial implications of testing positive.

"But the part of his day that caused the most anxiety was his commute to work—two hours and three buses each way. In a video he took one day, every seat on the bus is occupied, with people packed in the aisles.

Altogether, Samuel cared for two clients at the group home. He admitted there is a disservice to the clients he serves and also a disservice to himself. He acknowledged, "'Sometimes where we need to say no (to a job), we say yes, because we need the money' ... He worries about making rent, which he paid last month by draining his savings."

Samuel has also learned and inquired about employment insurance, but he was surprised to learn that he does not qualify.

Samuel's story highlights the importance of paid sick days now for all workers.

Like Samuel, many essential workers in my community and across Ontario don't have the luxury of not going to work if they don't feel safe. In fact, far too many workers are forced to make the impossible choice between going to work and risking furthering the spread of COVID-19 or

staying home and not being able to put food on the table for their families.

1830

Many essential workers like Samuel continue to cram into crowded buses, where they often stand shoulder to shoulder during rush hour. I've continued to hear from residents and have continued to see photos of crowded transit vehicles, even during the stay-at-home order. In addition to paid sick days, the government needs to provide adequate funding to transit agencies so they can put more buses on roads.

Despite what this government may claim, the federal program, the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit, is not a paid sick day program. It amounts to less than minimum wage. It's not enough to pay the bills, and you can only apply for it a week after you've been sick.

So I ask this government, will they finally take real action to give paid sick days and allow them to stay home if they are sick and take the time off to get vaccinated without having to lose income?

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Je prends la parole aujourd'hui pour appuyer le projet de loi de mon collègue le député de Don Valley East. Je l'appuie à 100 % et je pense qu'il a été très éloquent d'expliquer pourquoi tous les députés devraient appuyer ce projet de loi.

Le gouvernement insiste qu'il travaille sur un programme de congés de maladie payés, mais les Ontariens et les Ontariennes sont tannés d'attendre. Nous avons l'occasion aujourd'hui de garantir ce soutien nécessaire. Ce n'est pas le moment de jouer à des stratégies politiques pour essayer de prendre le crédit. Ça fait un an que tous les députés de l'opposition demandent ces congés, et tout ce que fait le gouvernement c'est de continuer de blâmer tout le monde sauf lui-même pour son inaction. La province est en crise.

Si le gouvernement veut vraiment protéger les travailleurs de l'Ontario, il va arrêter de perdre du temps, il va appuyer le projet de loi, et on pourra enfin offrir aux Ontariens et aux Ontariennes ce congé d'urgence payé attendu depuis très longtemps.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to say thank you to my friend and colleague the MPP for Don Valley East for putting forward this legislation. As he always says, this is a game-changer, and indeed it is. Paid sick leave, according to the Ontario science table, is their number two recommendation—that, along with paid vaccination leave.

Madam Speaker, I want to say to this government that there are consequences for inaction that cannot be revoked or erased. When you look at the fact that this government has been so slow to adopt this life-saving legislation that could quell the pandemic—it's not too late; you can act today.

I want you to remember that people are being transferred out of hot spot areas like my community of

Scarborough–Guildwood into non-COVID-19 communities. What does that say? That says that we are in this together.

The chief coroner has sounded the alarm today in the province of Ontario that young people are dying from COVID-19 at home, because the pandemic has mutated to the point that these variants are taking our young people quickly. We've never seen this before.

While the table has said what we should do, it has also said what we should not do. It has said that policies that harm or neglect racialized, marginalized and other vulnerable populations will not be effective against a disease that already affects these groups disproportionately. When you look at those infected by COVID-19, 80% are racialized communities.

This government has to get itself out of disarray and act now to protect the people of this province.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate this afternoon on Bill 247, on paid sick leave in the province of Ontario. But I have to say, Speaker, I'm angry that we're having the debate this afternoon. It was almost five months ago that I introduced a bill on paid sick days in Ontario, and we have not seen any response yet from this government. We understand that a plan is coming, but we await the details.

What is most important is that paid sick days be employer-provided so that they are seamless, so that they are uninterrupted and so that a worker is not financially penalized for doing the right thing, for following public health guidelines and staying home if they are sick.

I mentioned it was five months ago that I brought forward my bill. But let's think back, Speaker: It was actually in July 2020—and long before that—as the first wave of the pandemic was starting to subside, that SickKids released a guidance document on safely reopening schools. One of the things they highlighted in that guidance document was the importance of paid sick days to enable parents who had a sick child to keep that child home without having to risk losing their salary. SickKids identified this as a critical public health measure to keep schools safe and to reduce transmission in our community.

Speaker, the need for paid sick leave has been universally recognized in the province of Ontario by public health experts, by municipal councillors, by mayors, by boards of health, by medical officers of health, by small business owners, by worker advocates, who have all called on this government to introduce a program of paid sick days that is accessible to workers and that does not cause them to have to risk their own financial security and their ability to pay the bills at the end of the month.

Who are these workers who are in this position? They are mostly racialized. They are immigrant workers. They are women workers. They are women who work in care occupations, as early childhood educators, as PSWs, as grocery store clerks. They work in cashiering. They work in cleaning. These are the workers who are the least likely

to have access to paid sick days and who are at most risk of contracting COVID-19 on the job.

When I introduced my bill in December, at that time, workplaces were the second-most common site of COVID-19 transmission, after long-term-care homes. Since that time, as we saw the second wave sweep through the province, and now that we're in the throes of this third wave, workplaces have become the most likely place that somebody is going to contract COVID-19.

I think of my own community: We just had an outbreak at the Cargill meat processing plant in London. There are 900 employees there and 112—112—positive cases. London Transit Commission just reported that seven workers at the London Transit Commission have tested positive for COVID-19.

But, Speaker, that is nothing when you hear of the case counts in the GTA. One in four workers are testing positive. Two thirds of all GTA workers are classified as essential workers. They work in manufacturing, in warehousing, in logistics. They take packed buses to work. They live in densely populated neighbourhoods, often with multiple generations in the same home. It's very difficult to keep yourself safe when you're facing those kinds of conditions.

We, in this place, enjoy significant privilege in our lives. We have homes where we can—if somebody in the family gets sick, it's easy to isolate. Certainly, all MPPs have jobs where we are able to take a paid sick day if we become sick.

But the one thing that this pandemic has certainly shone a light on is the fact that if all of us are not safe, none of us are safe. Without providing paid sick days for workers in this province, all of our communities are at risk. That's why it is so important for the government to recognize its responsibility to step forward to invest in workers, to protect workers of this province and introduce a program of paid sick days that is seamless, uninterrupted and that does not financially penalize workers who need to stay home if they have COVID-19 symptoms.

1840

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

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne: There is no excuse for this government not moving forward today. The decision, according to the Premier yesterday, has been made. There will be a program for paid sick days. But he did not announce what that program will be. So pass this bill. It's the fastest way to get paid sick days in place. I know the OPS, and I know that the Ontario public service will work with you to put an implementation plan in place. So the excuse of "We need more time"—I do not buy that. I do not believe that. There are plans that can be put in place. Please pass this bill. There is no tearful press conference, no belated contrition that will make up for further inaction after the fact.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Wow, you left me a whole minute. What am I going to do with that?

It's good that I'm speaking after the member from Don Valley West—because we sat in these two chairs and we watched workplace protections that could raise the minimum wage, equal pay for equal work, sick notes, and paid sick days being taken away. It was really hard. And it was really hard for the member from Don Valley West, because it's what she brought forward and made real. What we know now is if those two paid sick days had stayed in place and hadn't been taken away, it would have saved lives.

You can vote today to save lives, and you need to do it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I return to the member from Don Valley East, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I'd like to thank all of my colleagues who spoke on the bill and, obviously, spoke in favour of the bill.

We do have an opportunity to do something right here. I know that politics does get in the way of good decision-making sometimes and people will make decisions based on what they're told by their House leaders or their leader within the party. But this is one of those bills that's just the right thing to do; there's no question about it. It's a very simple equation: You put in place a program that keeps people at home so they don't spread COVID-19 in the workplace. It's that simple. There's nothing more to it. The Premier can take the idea, implement it, champion it, take the credit for it, do anything he wants. We just want this done.

There have been 19 times that a motion or a bill by the member from London West has been presented in this House that this government has said no to—19 opportunities—while people are sick. The fact that this impacts

people based on their income level even harder—the fact that if you earn under \$25,000, there's a 70% chance you don't have that type of protection—speaks volumes to who this is impacting. It's not impacting us in this room; it's impacting the people we rely on to do what we do here in this room—people who are in grocery stores and restaurants, people who do the heavy lifting in our society while we sit in this room and talk a lot, as my daughter says. We talk a lot in here.

So let's do the right thing and do what's good for the people of Ontario. I'm asking my colleagues across: Please support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Mr. Coteau has moved second reading of Bill 247, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to personal emergency leave.

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 division being required, the vote on this item of private members' public business will be deferred until the next proceeding of deferred votes.

Second reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): All matters related to private members' public business having been completed, this House stands adjourned until Monday, April 26 at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1845.

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| Gill, Parm (PC) | Milton | |
| Glover, Chris (NDP) | Spadina—Fort York | |
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| Mantha, Michael (NDP) | Algoma—Manitoulin | |
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| McDonell, Jim (PC) | Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry | |
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| McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC) | Lambton—Kent—Middlesex | Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences |
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| Sandhu, Amarjot (PC) | Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest | |
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| 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 | |
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| Vanthof, John (NDP) | Timiskaming—Cochrane | Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle |
| Wai, Daisy (PC) | Richmond Hill | |

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| 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 | |
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